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In the coming pages you will meet the men who founded what would become a winning machine, relive its greatest triumphs and tragedies, take to the pitch with the finest players ever to pull on that famous jersey, and discover what the future may hold after Klopp leaves the dugout for the final time. This is the story of Liverpool, and to be among their number is to never walk alone.

FUTURE

THE STORY OF
LIVERPOOL FC

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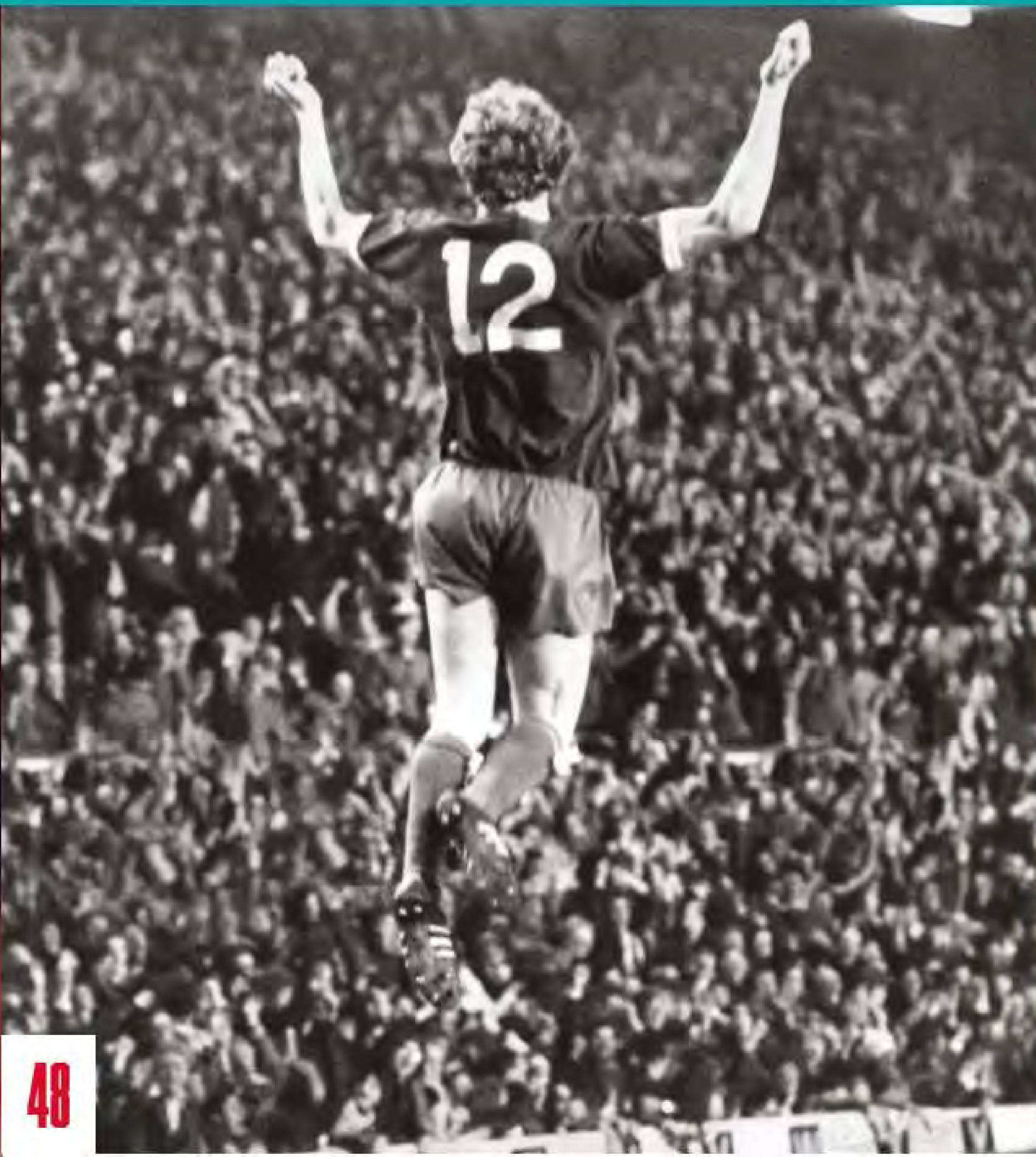
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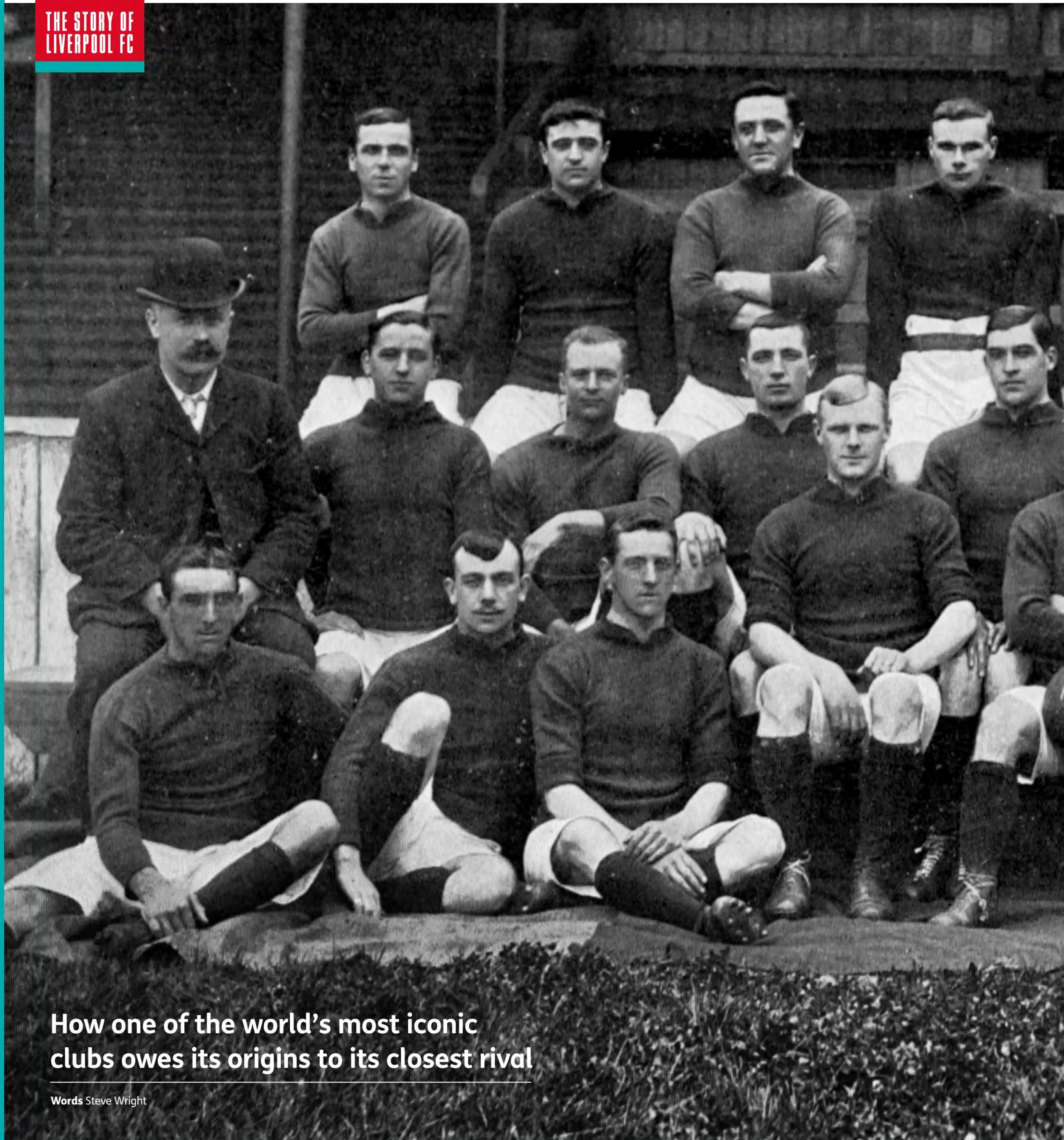




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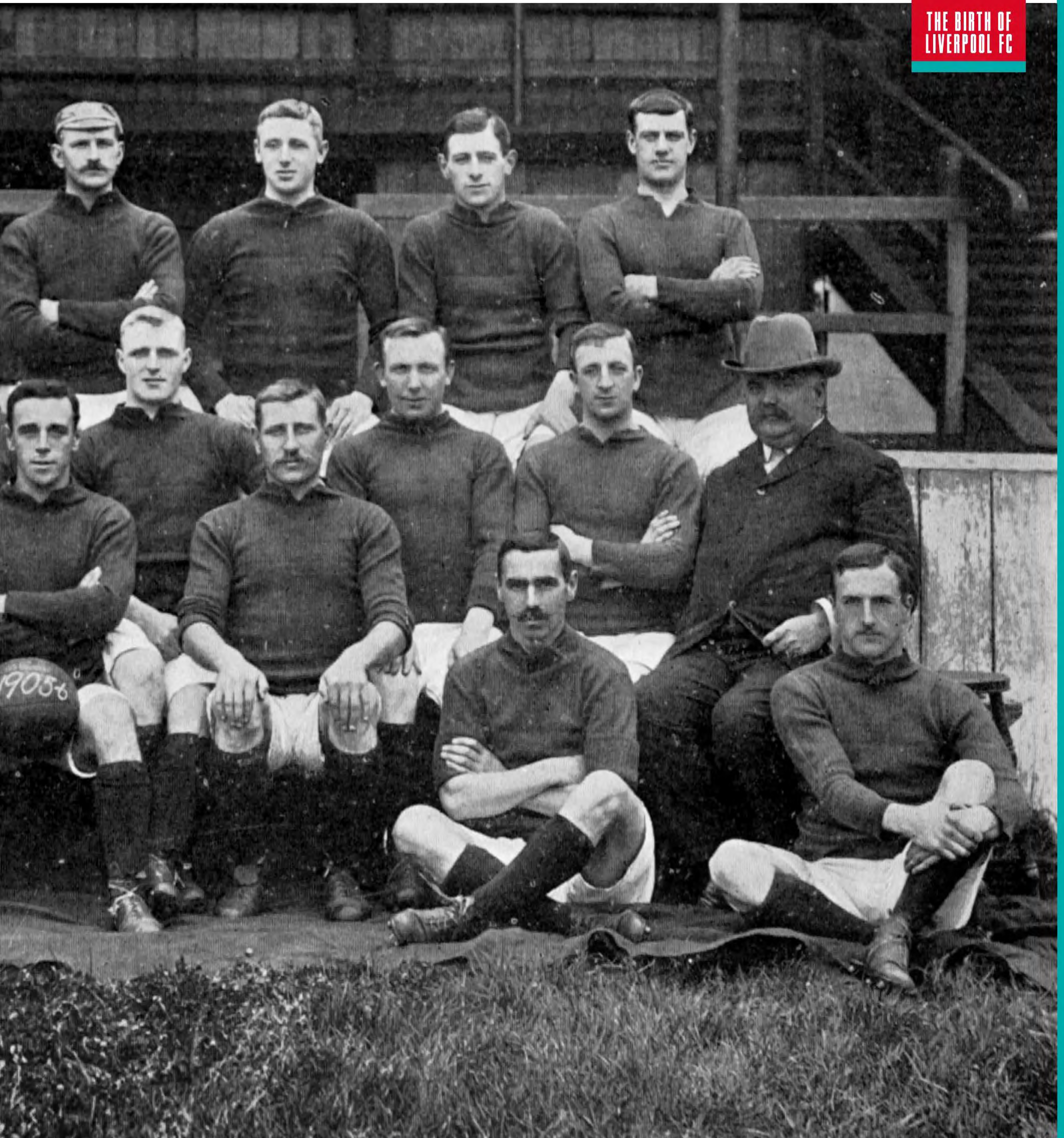




How one of the world's most iconic clubs owes its origins to its closest rival

Words Steve Wright

THE BIRTH OF



LIVERPOOL FC

In the footballing world, the name Liverpool is indelibly associated with one of the most successful and iconic football clubs in the world. Having remained at the peak of the English game for much of its history, it might surprise many to learn that it owes its origins to none other than its local rival.

The original tenants of Anfield – the ground that would come to see many nights of glory flecked with cheering red-clad supporters – were in fact, Everton. Under the ownership of John Houlding, they played there from 1884 until 1892.

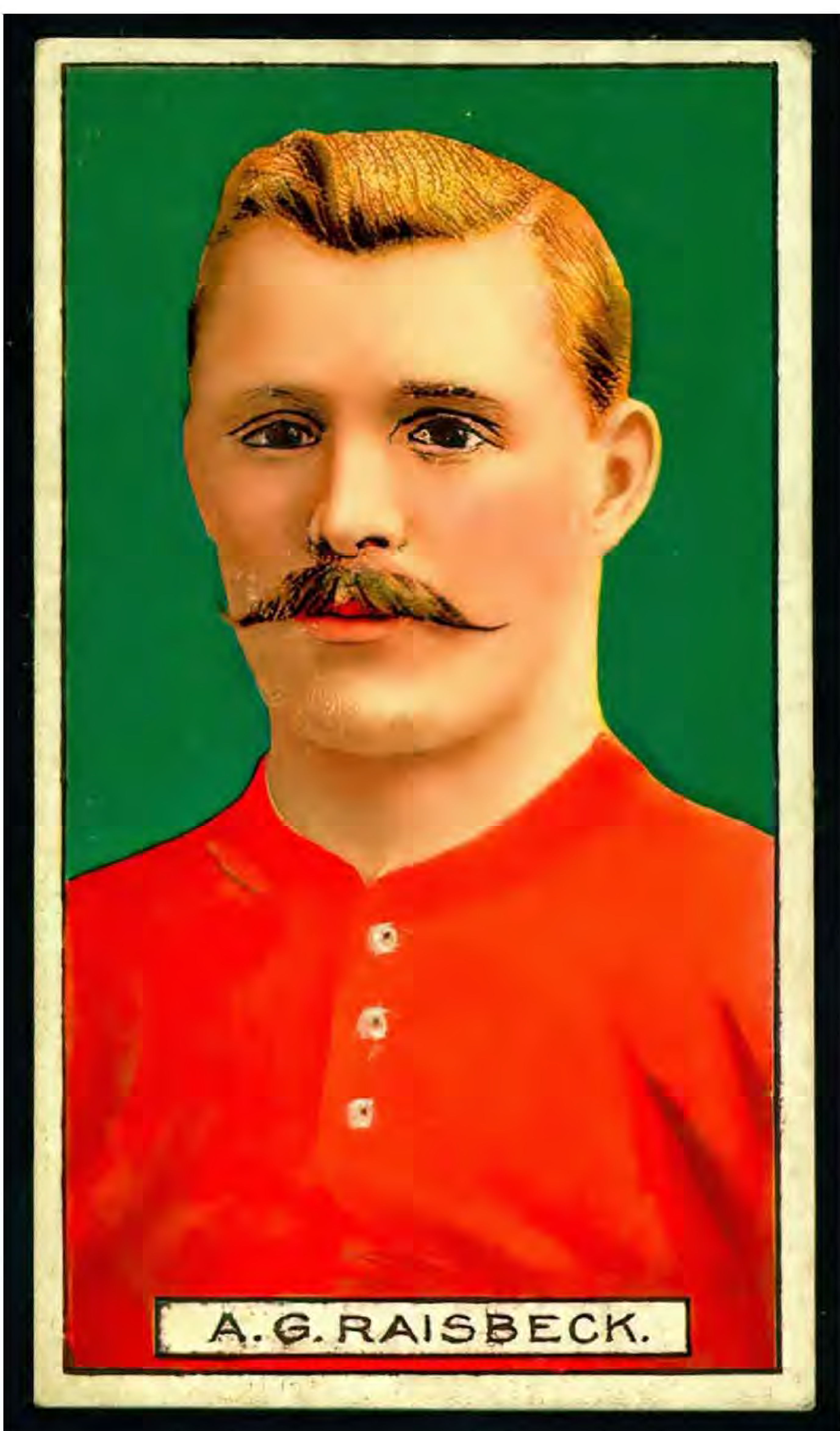
As tenants rather than owners of the ground, Everton paid Houlding an annual rent of £100. When he raised this to £250 in 1892, there was uproar, which, combined with other disagreements at board level, resulted in Everton leaving Anfield. Houlding was left with a ground without a club.

Somewhat cheekily, Houlding almost immediately attempted to register a new club under the near-identical name of 'Everton Football and Athletics Grounds Company Limited', but the Football League prevented this. Not to be deterred, Houlding settled on a new name: on 15 March 1892, Liverpool Football Club came into being.

Having their application to join the Football League turned down, Liverpool instead joined the Lancashire League. Managed by William Edward Barclay and hiring a team comprising mainly Scottish players (spawning the nickname 'team of Macs'), this Liverpool were a far cry from today. For a start, they still played in blue, and secondly, they got changed in the pub across the road from the ground.

Liverpool started life with an emphatic victory, defeating Rotherham Town 7-1 in a friendly at Anfield. Their first official game went even better, with Higher Walton getting thumped 8-0 (having trailed by five at half-time) in front of 300 spectators. The rest of the season unfolded in a similar fashion, with Liverpool not only claiming the title but also pipping Everton to the Liverpool Senior Cup. Sadly, one of their first pieces of silverware was stolen from the shop window it had been left in for fans to view.







Far left Legendary goalkeeper Elisha Scott (right) with his friend and rival Everton's Dixie Dean (left) **Left** Alex Raisbeck, the first of many big-money signings **Below** Billy Liddell in action for Liverpool against Blackburn Rovers

"TOM WATSON TURNED LIVERPOOL INTO ONE OF THE LEAGUE'S MOST EXCITING TIMES"

While Liverpool had grown in popularity, with their gate of 200 for the Rotherham game up to nearly 2,500 by the season's close, they were still small fry, relatively speaking, with Everton's gates nearing 13,000. They, along with fellow Merseysiders, Bootle, weren't fans of these new upstarts, with it not uncommon for one side's fans to switch their allegiance to the other when Liverpool were in town.

Upon finally being accepted into the Second Division (at the expense of Bootle, who resigned from the league due to financial issues) they wasted no time in making their mark, winning the first game, against Middlesbrough Ironopolis, 2-0 and staying unbeaten throughout the entire season (winning 22 games out of 28) to convincingly take home the title, before gaining promotion after winning a 'test match' (lacking conventional promotion and relegation, this was the name given to a game in which bottom of the First Division played top of the Second). Their opponents? Newton Heath, later reborn under the moniker of future arch-rivals Manchester United.

First Division life wasn't so accommodating for Liverpool, seeing them lose half of their 30 games (including a 3-0 reverse at Everton) before finishing bottom, relegated by a 1-0 test match defeat to Bury. Not to be deterred, they bounced back to gain promotion, and this time things were to change on a number of fronts.

For a start, manager John McKenna, who had replaced Barclay by this point, moved 'upstairs' into a boardroom role (later to become chairman after the death of Houlding in 1902). His position was filled by Sunderland manager Tom Watson. Secondly, Liverpool finally made the switch to the red shirts they would become known for. With Everton having already decided to wear blue shirts, Houlding immediately purchased 20 red tops from a nearby clothing store. Since red and white were the municipal colours of the city, it was fair to say that this was a masterstroke from Houlding. In one fell swoop, his club now had both the city's name and its colours. The later adoption of the city's liver bird symbol for the club's crest strengthened this link with the place and its people further.

Having won three titles during six years at Sunderland, Watson came highly rated, and Houlding make him the league's highest-paid manager with a salary of £300. He quickly earned every penny by taking Liverpool to the semi-final of the FA Cup for the first time, where they were defeated 3-0 by Aston Villa. Despite this impressive cup performance, it was a while before these performances were translated to the league. Retaining their top-league status for the 1898–99 season, they made it to the last day needing just a draw against Aston Villa to take home the title. However, they went down 5-0. League glory was postponed.

Luckily, they didn't have to wait too long. Watson had turned Liverpool into one of the league's most exciting sides, one helped by the respect and subsequent popularity he commanded: "Everyone he met liked him and was always ready to do him a service," wrote Victor Hall in the *Liverpool Echo*. Galvanised by the signing of defender Alex Raisbeck from Hibernian in 1898 (who would go on to play 312 games for the club), they took home the club's first title, with Johnny Walker tapping home the winner in a final-day victory over West Bromwich Albion.

While fortunes were to dip once again, with a couple of lacklustre league finishes pre-empting relegation at the end of the 1903–04 season, they made history by being the first club to follow up a Second Division title win with the First Division crown. They also made it to another FA Cup semi-final tie, this time bowing out to Everton.

Even as Liverpool made waves on the pitch, they continued to grow off it. Expansions to Anfield arrived in the form of new stands

"GORDON HODGSON SCORED 241 GOALS BETWEEN 1925 AND 1936"





being constructed in 1895 and 1903, but it was in 1906 that a true icon of the city – and of football – was born. Named the Spion Kop after a hilltop in South Africa where many British soldiers – mainly from Liverpool – were killed in 1900 during the Boer War, it quickly became famous due to both its size and the atmosphere it produced.

After finishing second behind Aston Villa in 1909–10 (a season that included a heart-stopping 6-5 victory over Newcastle having come back from 5-2 down), a few middling league finishes were bookended by Liverpool's first FA Cup final appearance, against Burnley in front of over 72,000 at Crystal Palace. Cup glory would have to wait, however, as they went down 1-0 through a volley from Bert Freeman.

This was to be followed by a particularly dark chapter in the club's history, as a number of Liverpool players were implicated in a betting scandal during a 2-0 defeat against Manchester United. With rumours of the players being seen drinking together before the game and members of the two sides clearly going through the motions, the FA were quick to investigate. Finding them guilty of match-fixing, Liverpool's Jackie Sheldon, Tom Fairfoul, Bob Purcell and Tom Miller (plus three United players) were given lifetime bans, although the club itself escaped punishment. With the Football League being suspended due to the outbreak of World War I, all bar one United player had their bans quashed in recognition of their military service.

Watson had left by the time football resumed for the 1919–20 season (his 19-year stint remains the longest managerial spell at Liverpool). His replacement, David Ashworth, while only staying for four seasons, can be credited with truly putting Liverpool on the footballing map. Employing the services of local fitness trainer William Connell to whip his team into shape, he coupled physical fitness with previously unseen tactical acumen, employing traits like interchangeable positions to outwit opponents.

The individual players were formidable, too: keeper Elisha Scott spent 22 years at Anfield, with many regarding him as one of the greatest keepers to grace the game; captain Donald McKinlay proved to be a no-nonsense presence, and Dick Forshaw and Harry Chambers turned scoring into an art form. They garnered the nickname 'the Untouchables' as they romped home to a league title in 1922. Despite Ashworth departing for Oldham Athletic in February 1923 to be closer to home, Liverpool took home another title with former player Matt McQueen at the helm.

Ultimately, McQueen was never able to replicate this triumph – nor was George Patterson, who replaced him in 1928. An array of mid- and lower-league table finishes followed, with highlights being few and far between. Standouts during this period include striker Gordon Hodgson, who scored 241 in 377 games between and 1925 and 1936, and the form of Scott, who remains Liverpool's longest-serving player. Both would strike up rivalries of sorts with legendary Everton striker Dixie Dean, who would often meet up with Scott after their encounters for a post-game post-mortem.

When Patterson stepped down for health reasons, his replacement, Southampton's George Kay, initially fared little better, with Liverpool only narrowly avoiding relegation in 1937. However, the resumption of the league in 1946 following World War II brought with it new tidings, with Kay leading them to league victory.

While the likes of Albert Stubbins, Jack Balmer and Billy Liddell took the plaudits (the remarkable ability of the latter meant the club was sometimes called 'Liddellpool'), supporters were unaware that the title-winning team also contained two future managers: Phil Taylor and Bob Paisley.

Their future greatness wasn't immediately apparent, however, as following a few more seasons of disappointment (interrupted by a 1950 FA Cup final defeat against Arsenal), Kay was replaced by Don Welsh. This did not bring about an improvement in fortunes: after a few more seasons of woe, they were relegated at the end of the 1953–54 season, bringing to an end a 50-year spell in the top flight.

For the first time, they didn't bounce back, finishing 11th – their lowest league placing to date – a setback compounded by a record 9-1 reverse to Birmingham City. Third place the following season led to Phil Taylor being installed in an attempt to revive the team. Despite bringing in players like Ronnie Moran and Alan A'Court and recruiting future managers Paisley and Joe Fagan to his backroom, things didn't work out, a humiliating defeat to non-league Worcester City in the FA Cup in 1959 a particular low point. Taylor was soon shown the door. His replacement? Huddersfield manager Bill Shankly. Not that anyone knew it, but the real glory days were just around the corner...

Left (top) Gordon Hodgson was a standout during a period of relatively little success for Liverpool
Left (bottom) The site of where history was made
Left (bottom right) This period saw the emergence of future legends like Alan A'Court

THE LORD MAYOR'S SHOW

Few men can claim to have had a guiding hand in the founding of not one but two iconic football clubs. But then few men are John Houlding.

Born in 1833, Houlding's career and life were indelibly linked to the city. Educated at Liverpool College, he later became a familiar face in the local Conservative Party, representing the ward of Everton on the Liverpool City Council. He was even elected to the position of Lord Mayor in 1897.

Later a participant at Everton Cricket Club, his involvement morphed into his capacity as president of the football club, formed in 1888 as one of the league's founding members.

Having become wealthy thanks to his owning of a brewery, Houlding came into ownership of a number of properties, including the land that was to one day become Anfield.

When Everton vacated the land and Liverpool FC was formed, Houlding's involvement saw the club go from strength to strength. However, his health worsened, and he passed away on a trip to the south of France in 1902.

A bust was unveiled in his memory outside Anfield in 2018 to mark the 125th anniversary of Liverpool FC's birth.




KOP

ANFIELD'S GOLDEN AGE

An unprecedented era of success in Europe began in one modest boot room on Merseyside

Words **Mark White**



THE LIVERBIRD RISES

The worst mistake of Bill Shankly's life was giving up the good times. Plenty would learn from his errors later down the line.

He'd had scrapes with retirement in the past, threatening to walk away from Liverpool, but Shankly always shunned the sunset for one more ride. But in 1974, as the Scot returned from the Wembley pitch to sit in the dressing room after winning a second FA Cup, the tiredness had caught up with him. Not unlike a certain Jürgen Klopp in 2024, he was to leave at the top.

Shankly was more than a football manager; he was a football activist. A man of charisma, philosophy and unbreakable belief who enraptured half a city with his ideals and earned the grudging respect of the other half.

"It is with great regret that I as chairman of Liverpool Football Club have to inform you that Mr Shankly has intimated that he wishes to retire from active participation in league football," chairman John Smith wrote. "And the board has with extreme reluctance accepted his decision."

Yet, after restoring the Reds to a pedestal, revolutionising the way that many saw the game and laying the foundations for Liverpool to become the biggest club in English football, Shankly still didn't see his legacy as complete. Even after deciding to call it a day, he could never be satisfied with what he'd achieved.

Over two decades earlier, in 1951, Shankly interviewed for the Liverpool manager's job. He was overlooked, but such a rejection provided a steep learning curve that would culminate in a funereal reaction from the Reds chiefs who opted not to hire him.

Shankly would return to Anfield for another interview some eight years later, with the idea of uniting a city and turning Liverpool into what he called a "bastion of invincibility". In the interim, he'd fallen out with boards, developed incredible young players like Denis Law and even hammered his new employers 5-0 with Huddersfield Town, later describing the exodus of Liverpool board members leaving the old Leeds Road ground in single file as a "funeral procession", though he had never finished above 12th in the old Second Division.

And so the Scot arrived at Anfield, alongside a new quartet of backroom staff: Shankly as manager, with Bob Paisley, Joe Fagan and Reuben Bennett assisting. In time, he transformed the club both on and off the field through his natural enthusiasm: the one trait that he called "the greatest thing in the world".

Success didn't come over night. In 1961, with attendances dropping like a stone, Solly Isenwater, chairman of the shareholders' association, attempted to hold a vote of no confidence in the manager. Thankfully for the club, Shankly survived. The Reds would be promoted within 12 months, and two years later they were champions of England.

Shankly had totally revolutionised the club, letting over 20 players leave in his first year and bringing in five-a-side training sessions and shorter, more intense 'sweat box' drills intended to push players to the edge. Meanwhile, on the recruitment side, he would search for personalities rather than profiles, looking for an untameable hunger in youngsters that he recognised in himself.

In 1965, a year on from the maiden league title, Shankly beat Don Revie's Leeds to the FA Cup, with Roger Hunt and Ian St John netting to win the trophy. "To think a team like Liverpool had never won the FA Cup was unbelievable, so many had prayed for it to happen over all the years, but it had never come to pass," Shankly declared, as half a million Liverpudlians greeted their heroes on the streets.

A year later, Liverpool lifted a second league title. It was around this time that

Above Liverpool's boot room: (from left to right) Bill Shankly, Bob Paisley, Ronnie Moran, Joe Fagan and Reuben Bennett **Right** Shankly with his trophy haul, including a league title, FA Cup and Charity Shield



The city of Liverpool turns out to welcome the FA Cup winners from Wembley



ONE DAY AT WEMBLEY

The better the opposition, the better that Liverpool played, according to Bill Shankly. Although it took until after the 90 minutes of normal time for the first goal to be scored, the Reds ultimately toppled the mighty Leeds to win their first FA Cup on their third attempt.

Both sides toiled all game to no avail, creating very little, only for legs to tire in extra-time on either side as Liverpool and Leeds went for broke. Roger Hunt (who would become a World Cup hero little over 12 months later) opened the scoring, sending the red half of Wembley into euphoria, only for midfield hardman Billy Bremner to cancel out Liverpool's strike in the second half of extra-time. With the game edging towards full-time, Ian St John headed home, delivering a sucker-punch to the Whites and giving Merseyside the glory.

Shankly would come to call it his greatest afternoon in management, while his opposite number on the touchline, Don Revie, admitted that his side hadn't been the better team. It was to be the springboard for a glittering career for Shankly and one that would propel Liverpool into a golden era. Liverpool finally had their first FA Cup – the first of many to come.

Liverpool wore all red in Europe, with Shankly telling his wife, “Tonight I went out onto Anfield, and for the first time there was a glow like a fire was burning.” His players looked and played like giants, he remarked.

European football would provide opportunities for Shankly and his boot room to learn how to handle ties, as Anfield would first become a fortress under the lights. ‘You’ll Never Walk Alone’ became a club anthem – and one of Shankly’s picks on *Desert Island Discs* – while mistakes were made in the transfer market, some costlier than others. A teenage Johan Cruyff tore the Reds apart in Europe, and the ’60s ended with a whimper on Merseyside.

However, it was during this time that Shankly made arguably his greatest signing: Geoff Twentyman. The former Liverpool trainee would become chief scout, looking for players with the technical ability and heart to represent their godlike manager. Some of his finest discoveries included a young forward at Chester called Ian Rush and a defender plying his trade at Partick Thistle who went by the name Alan Hansen.

1970 heralded a sea change at Anfield. St John, Hunt, Ron Yeats and Tommy Lawrence all moved on, replaced by the likes of Ray Clemence, John Toshack, Brian Hall and Steve Heighway. 1971’s FA Cup final – an epic won by Arsenal in the Wembley sun after Liverpool took the lead – would be watched in person by new recruit, Kevin Keegan.

In 1972, Shankly installed the iconic ‘This is Anfield’ sign, as Liverpool, led by Keegan up front, would lose the title to Derby by a point. It reaffirmed the old ground as a mythical cauldron, as the following season Liverpool would record 21 consecutive home wins en route to a third title under Shankly before a UEFA Cup triumph. The Reds beat Borussia Mönchengladbach 3-2 on aggregate – a side the Scot named the best in the world – before his swansong, which

Right Fans flood onto the pitch after Liverpool clinch the 1976–77 league title
Far right Emlyn Hughes and David Fairclough with the First Division trophy
Below Bob Paisley salutes the crowd as Liverpool win his final title as manager



“WE MUST TRY TO CARRY ON WHAT HE’S STARTED”

BOB PAISLEY







came a year later at Wembley in a stunning 3-0 FA Cup final win over Newcastle.

In his retirement, Shankly struggled to let go of football, according to some. He would turn up at Melwood to train with Liverpool, even take coaching sessions. He eventually had to be told to leave. He was offered a place on the board, but having always regretted retiring, he died eight years later, mere months after another hero of Merseyside, John Lennon.

Both are still worshipped in the city, and both created their own myths and culture. Shankly wasn't just Liverpool FC's founding father; he simply *was* the club.

THE RELUCTANT SAVIOUR

The players called Bill Shankly 'Boss'. Bob Paisley was just 'Bob'. After retiring as manager in 1974, Shankly was there to welcome his returning players to training on the first day back for the following season, track-suited and as fresh as ever. The Liverpool players were a little confused, but Shankly was struggling to come to terms with his retirement. When one commented on his former assistant Paisley taking the reins, Shankly snapped, "I could have left a monkey in charge."

It was an awkward handover. Paisley had even tried to change Shankly's mind about retirement before reluctantly stepping forward to assume control of Liverpool. On his first day in the job he told his players that he "didn't really want the job", but that "we must try to carry on what he's started."

Few could have ever envisaged just how dominant that side was going to become – least of all the Geordie himself, who would become arguably England's greatest ever football manager in just nine years at the very top of football.

Paisley saw working for Liverpool as a duty. A gunner in the 73rd Medium Regiment during World War II, he then served as a Liverpool left-half, club captain, a self-taught physiotherapist who could diagnose an injury by eye, and then Bill Shankly's right-hand man.

Liverpool's assistant manager at the time was 'cornered' by club chiefs who wanted him to assume Shankly's mantle. He was always seen as the tactician behind a more vocal, charismatic leader, though Paisley never saw himself as such. He simply had an eye for a player and believed that if he could pick 11 men capable of reading the game in the right circumstances, his side could overcome anyone – almost anyone, in his


Ray Kennedy celebrates with goalscorers Kevin Keegan and David 'Supersub' Fairclough

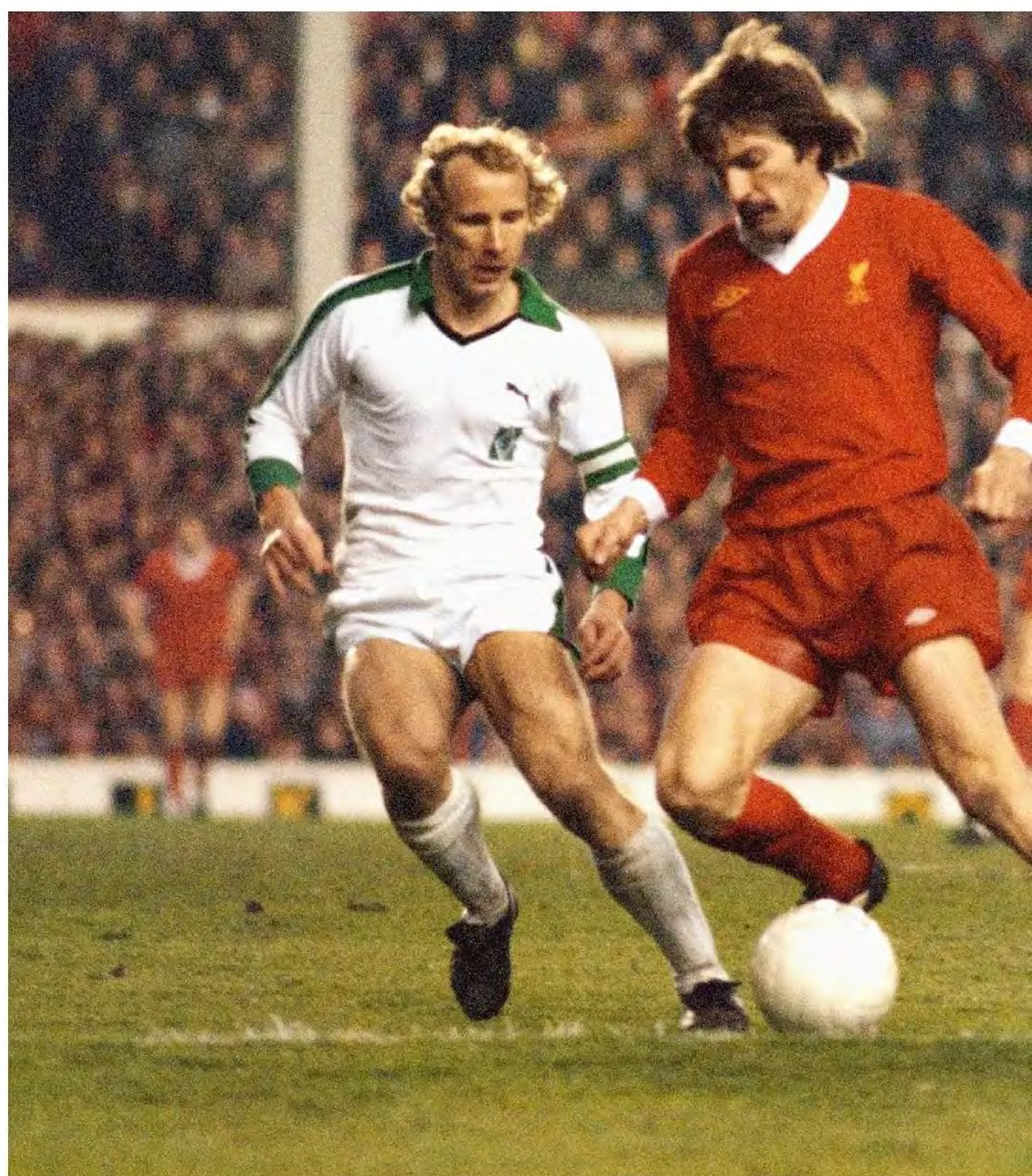
THE NIGHT OF THE SUPERSUB

Substitutes weren't even a thing until the mid-1960s, and it wasn't until the late '80s before two were even permitted in a game. While Roger Hunt and Alun Evans both regularly appeared from the bench, the idea of a supersub grew wings in the '70s, and perhaps one man did more for the phenomenon than anyone else.

It was the night of 16 March 1977, and French giants Saint-Étienne were 1-0 up against Liverpool after their home leg victory. The Merseysiders would need the Kop to roar them on in the second leg, and it didn't disappoint. As the stands shook to the sounds of thousands of Scousers cheering their side, Kevin Keegan scored within two minutes to level the tie, but Les Verts equalised after half-time to take a 2-1 aggregate lead. As the hour mark approached Ray Kennedy struck to make it 2-2 on aggregate. Then, with 20 minutes left, David Fairclough replaced John Toshack.

Paisley's men only had six minutes to find a crucial third goal when Fairclough latched onto a lofted through ball, burst into the box and slid home the winner. Within seconds he found himself under a pile of team-mates as Anfield swayed to chants of "We shall not be moved."

The 20-year-old would go on to become the first real substitute superstar, scoring 55 goals for the Reds, with 18 coming in 62 appearances off the bench, though Fairclough didn't always like the moniker. "I appreciate now that it's said positively," he later said. "It's brilliant to be part of this great club's history. But at the time it was how people wanted to think of me, and I hated it."





"WE'VE WON EVERYTHING ELSE... THERE'S A FEELING THAT THE EUROPEAN CUP IS GOING TO BE NEXT" KEVIN KEEGAN

Left Kenny Dalglish keeps the 1977–78 European Cup trophy close by **Below** Steve Heighway fends off Berti Vogts in the European Cup semi-final **Below right** The Reds celebrate another trophy – this time the Charity Shield

first season at least, in 1975, as Liverpool finished second.

The Reds reclaimed pole position in 1976, however, coming from behind to beat Wolves 3-1 to lift a tenth league title. They won the UEFA Cup once more, too, as the revolution of Shankly was replaced by gentle evolution under Paisley.

An avuncular figure, he was not known for the big speeches favoured by his predecessor. He looked to oversee a smooth transition to a more ball-playing style that was decades ahead of its time. Defenders were encouraged to pass the ball more, and Phil Thompson moved into the defence to lead from the back. It was a style that would reap rewards on the continent.

"We've won everything else in the last five years and there's a feeling that the European Cup is going to be next," Kevin Keegan would declare in '76, pre-empting the first great capture of Old Big Ears, with Paisley becoming just the second manager of an English side to lift a European Cup as once again Borussia Mönchengladbach were beaten by the Reds.

Sadly, the dream of a treble had been dashed by Manchester United four days earlier, Tommy Docherty's unfancied charges beating Liverpool 2-1 in the FA Cup final. Then came Keegan's shock departure to West German side Hamburg that summer.

Despite his affable demeanour, Paisley was never afraid to let big players leave, shrewdly identifying when it was the right time to move them on. He would avoid confrontation and offer a cold shoulder: Graeme Souness described praise from the Geordie as like "a snowstorm in the Sahara".

Kenny Dalglish arrived from Celtic to replace Keegan, and Paisley's status as the quiet genius, capable of reconfiguring a moving machine without losing pace at the top was reaffirmed, as Liverpool retained the European Cup, with King Kenny netting the winner over Club Brugge at Wembley Stadium. Kenny was Paisley's man all right, and he would later assume the hotseat himself, with his former manager mentoring him from the shadows.

While things were rosy in Europe, however, there was a new rival in English football led by a manager who perfectly contrasted the reserved Paisley. Liverpool won the European Cup in 1978 but were seven points adrift in the title race and lost the League Cup. Brian Clough's Nottingham Forest were just too good. Clough was cut from the same cloth as Shankly, a charmer who knew his own merits.

It looked like the changing of the guard in the European Cup first round of 1978–79 as Forest dispatched Liverpool. Thankfully, the Reds' league form remained outstanding. A run of 12 games unbeaten helped them to secure the title by eight points, a campaign in which Liverpool recorded an all-time haul and conceded just 16 goals. They would retain the league title in 1980, going unbeaten at Anfield.

Despite this success, Paisley was not about to get complacent. Jimmy Case and Ray





Kennedy were unceremoniously moved on mere months after being arrested after being caught fighting the proprietors of a Welsh hotel, while Ian Rush was goaded by his manager when the then 19-year-old asked for a £100-a-week pay rise.

"Have you scored yet?" asked Paisley. "Can't you take responsibility? When I was your age I was in charge of a tank in the war." The astute man manager then informed Rush in a later meeting that he was placing him on the transfer list. An infuriated Rush began to plunder goals relentlessly in a bid to prove Paisley wrong. When the newly prolific young Welshman later asked to be taken off the transfer list, Paisley told him he'd never been on it in the first place.

In 1981, Liverpool uncharacteristically dropped to fifth in the table, but they still triumphed over six-time holders Real Madrid in Paris, winning the club's third European Cup and showing what 'mentality monsters' really looked like. It remains the last time Los Blancos lost a European Cup final.

By 1983, Paisley had been crowned a champion of England twice more after the brutal decision to drop Phil Thompson as captain during the side's wobble two years earlier. After 44 years at Anfield in various roles, he stepped aside. He managed nine years, almost modestly refusing to round it up to a decade at the helm.

His haul of 20 trophies in that time was testament to his genius: a humble man underestimated by many who ultimately proved his doubters spectacularly wrong.

TREBLE ON THE MERSEY

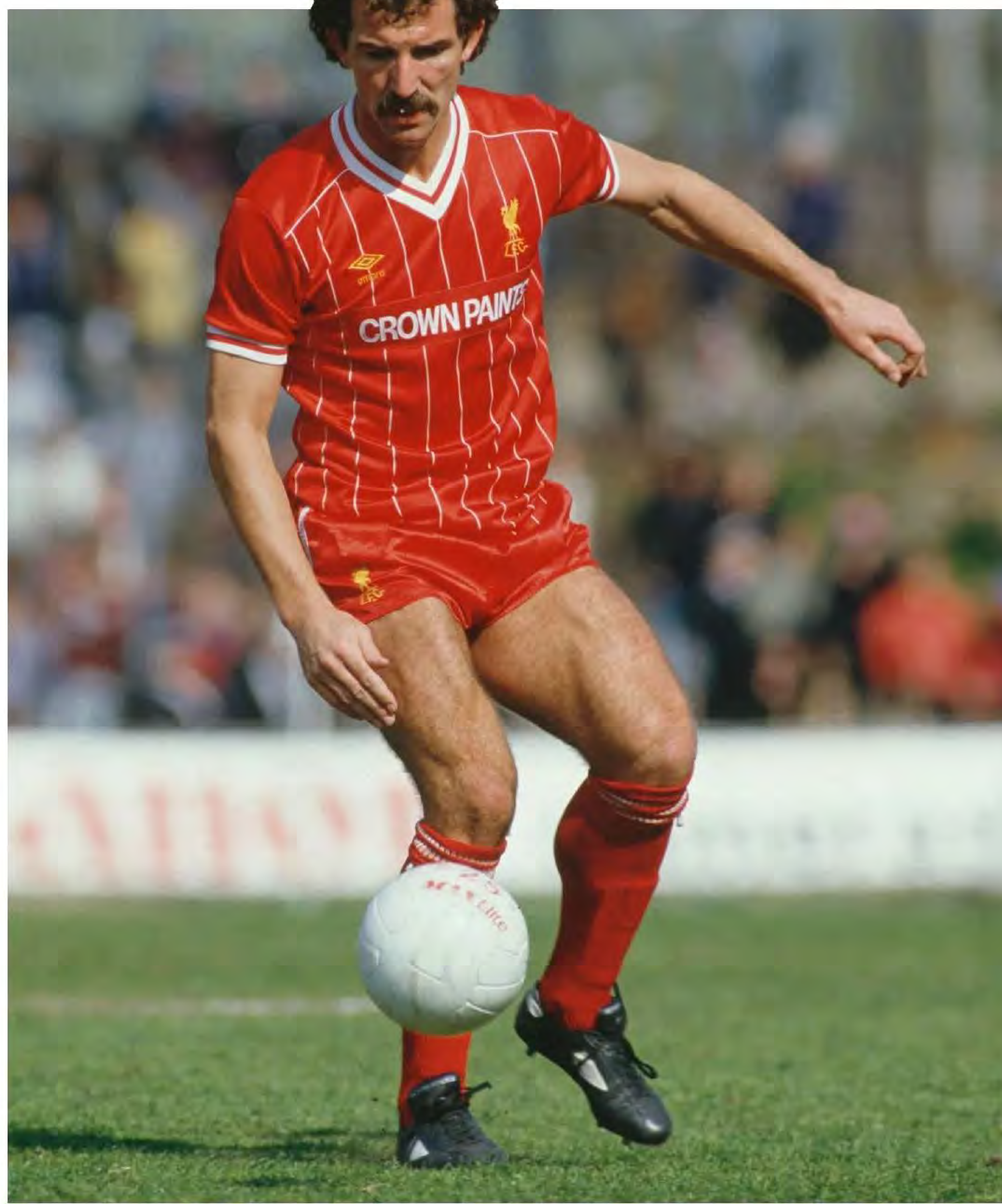
"You must have been a good player, Joe, because I tried to sign you," Bill Shankly told Joe Fagan on his first day on the job at Liverpool. Perhaps he had always earmarked him as someone special.

During Shankly's time at Anfield Fagan was head of the reserve side, nurturing the talents of youngsters such as Roger Hunt, Ian Callaghan and Tommy Smith as Shankly devised a pathway from joining Liverpool to stepping into the first team. Living just a stone's throw from Anfield, he advocated the importance of the

Above Ian Rush celebrates Phil Neal putting Liverpool ahead against Roma in the 1984 European Cup final **Right** The team pose with the 1983–84 First Division trophy **Top right** Talisman and captain Graeme Souness on the ball









players feeling at home at the stadium and helped to install a common room.

Like his own players, he had risen through the ranks, becoming one of Shankly's coaches in the '70s after stepping away from the reserve setup. In 1979, he become Paisley's assistant. When the Geordie stepped aside in 1983, there was simply only one man to replace him. Like Paisley, however, Fagan had shown little interest in actually managing Liverpool.

The Walton-born winner is often forgotten in the annals of English football. He is the sequel to the sequel for some, the man who followed the messiah and the genius.

"He was just a lovely, lovely human being," his captain, Graeme Souness, later waxed of him – but he was far more, and he deserves to be remembered as one of English football's greats.

That first season post-Paisley was one of the most beloved campaigns of any by fans. By November, Liverpool were sitting atop the tree, where they stayed until the end of the season. The Reds realised that they had misunderstood Fagan: referred to as 'Uncle Joe' for offering the kindness that complemented surly Paisley, he was tough when he needed to be. This traditional English tactician would attack with a ferocity that not even Shankly had attempted, using three forwards when need be.

His courageous methods worked. In 1984, Liverpool became the first English side to win three trophies in a single season: a championship, a European Cup on penalties and a League Cup. Not bad for a debut season in management, but backing it up was always going to be tough, especially with Souness departing.

Fagan had hoped to secured the likes of Charlie Nicholas and Michael Laudrup prior to the 1984–85 season but missed out. Even so, Liverpool would finish second in the league, navigate a route to an FA Cup semi-final and reach another European Cup final, a game Liverpool would lose 1-0 to Juventus after the horrors of what became known as the Heysel Stadium disaster had unfolded prior to kick-off. The tragedy would haunt Fagan, who announced he was stepping down as manager just hours after 39 people had lost their lives.

Fagan's watch ended just two years in. He burned bright, achieved immortality and then faded away. Perhaps in part because of the contrast between his first and second terms, Fagan is not held in the same high regard as his predecessors. He was not at Anfield long enough to be revered as a god, nor a king or man of the gates (he was 62 when he assumed the throne).

Yet perhaps Fagan would have preferred being remembered with pleasant warmth rather than the passion and intensity that Shankly and Paisley conjure when Liverpool fans think of them. He was simply another modest man, one who remained in that house around the corner from the ground until he died in June 2001. He served his club the best he could – and boy, was his best rather brilliant.



53 years ago, a lean 20-year-old made his Liverpool bow following an almighty leap from the Fourth Division, but Kevin Keegan's incredible success would extend far beyond the Kop during a fascinating career of pop singles, punch-ups and cracking perms

Words Ed McCambridge

HEAD OVER HEELS IN LOVE

© Getty Images/Alamy

FROM THE FourFourTwo ARCHIVES

It all started in the back of a van, rumbling between Doncaster and Scunthorpe. It was the summer of 1966 and sat behind the wheel was Bob Nellis, a furniture salesman who'd once had trials with the former. Now in his thirties, Nellis' football career consisted of the odd Sunday League kickabout as well as helping to coach a local kids team.

Dreams of making it had long since expired; Nellis didn't even have enough balls or kit to run his training sessions. As luck would have it, the solution to acquiring some was getting changed on the back seat of his van: a scrawny 15-year-old lad named Joseph.

Nellis had initially met the youngster a few weeks earlier and hadn't much enjoyed the encounter. Turning out for his local pub team, he was tasked with marking the skinny waif playing on the right of midfield. Such was the runaround Nellis received, he approached the kid at the final whistle. Nellis had a contact at Scunthorpe United, he explained, and ten balls and a bag of kit had been promised if he could bring them someone worth signing.

Joseph had been to trials before, including at Coventry, but his miniature 5ft 8in stature proved a stumbling block. Still, the offer was a no-brainer for this pint-sized pub footballer who'd just quit school to work for a nearby brassworks firm.

Once delivered to the Old Show Ground, Scunthorpe's original home, the prodigy's trial consisted of a cross-country run before a match on the car park adjacent to the pitch. Even on gravel, it was obvious that the teen was wasted on ballcocks and toilet fittings. Iron manager Ron Ashman summoned the trialist to his office before the session had even concluded.

That night, Nellis drove home with a new bag of balls on his back seat. And Joseph Kevin Keegan was a professional footballer.

WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT KEVIN

Scunthorpe had been relegated to the Fourth Division before Keegan made his first-team debut in September 1968, aged only 17. The team trained on a rugby pitch owned by the local council, and players took turns to drive the minibus to matches. During the summer, they found part-time work to beef up their income; Keegan, for example, worked on the railways for British Steel.

Despite his shabby surroundings, the young forward was determined to shine. "The thing that impresses me most about you is that you're a hundred percenter," fitness trainer Jack Brownsword told him. Keegan would regularly be seen running up and down the terraces, weights tied to his waist, long after team-mates clocked off.

The starlet made 89 appearances across his first two seasons, and his performances quickly attracted interest from bigger clubs. Indeed, such was the buzz around Keegan that Granada Television visited Scunthorpe's Quibell Park training ground to interview the coveted 19-year-old.

"I'm 'appy here... it's a very good club," the pearly faced Keegan tells presenter Gerald Sinstadt in his soft Yorkshire accent while mud-caked team-mates shoot into a rugby goal over his shoulder. "I'm getting first-team football – should think if I went First Division, I'd struggle a bit."

It was soon time to test that hypothesis. In 1971, Scunthorpe accepted a £33,000 offer from Liverpool. Ashman, who negotiated the deal himself, drove Keegan to Anfield. "Have you got a good suit?" he asked his protégé. "Where you're heading, you're going to need to look smart."

The Reds had gone five campaigns without winning a major trophy, and bringing in a 20-year-old from the fourth tier went unnoticed.

"We didn't know anything about him," Ian Callaghan, Liverpool's record appearance holder with 857 outings between 1960 and 1978, tells *FFT*. "We went on a pre-season tour and this lad called Kevin came with us. That was the first time we'd ever seen or heard of him."

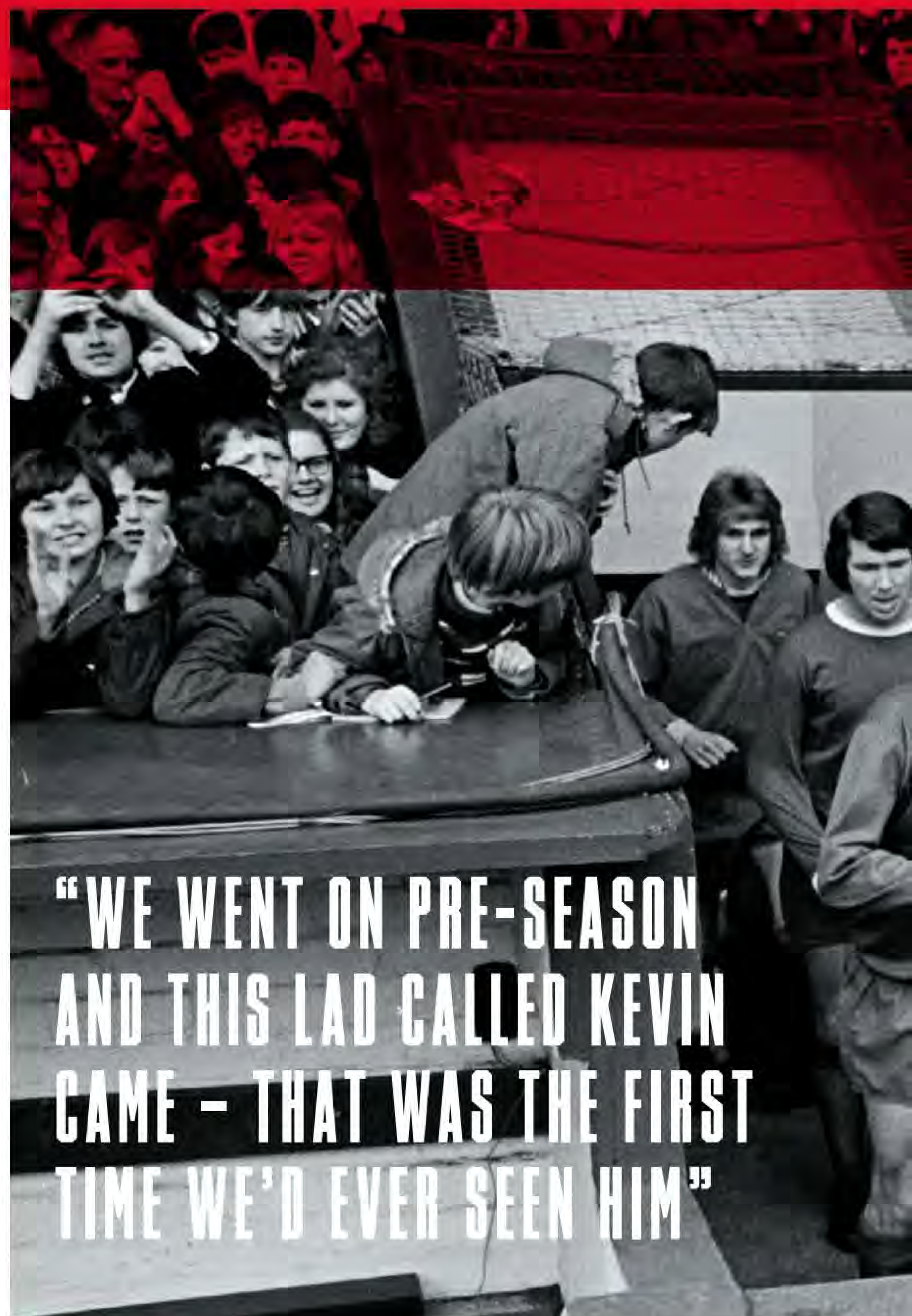
Callaghan admits the squad were instantly impressed by Keegan's determination. "His enthusiasm and energy were fantastic from the off," he recalls. "He was a very fit young guy and he gave everything – you could see how much he wanted it."

Though he was signed as an understudy to Callaghan at right-midfield, Keegan's lack of positional discipline during training prompted a rethink. After watching him play up front in a youth match, Reds boss Bill Shankly gave him a chance there in a first-team training game. Unbridled by defensive concerns, Keegan scored four in a 7-0 rout.

A senior debut soon followed, with Keegan handed the No.7 shirt against Nottingham Forest at Anfield in August 1971. He arrived into the dressing room almost half an hour late – "I hadn't anticipated the traffic around the ground on matchdays" – but shook off a Shankly rollicking to score the opener after 12 minutes in a 3-1 victory. Unsurprisingly, Keegan was teed up that day by Welsh strike partner John Toshack.

"He quickly formed an excellent partnership with Tosh," remembers Callaghan. "They had such a connection." In fact, so in tune did the pair seem, they later appeared on a 1974 ITV show to try to prove if they actually had telepathic powers. "It came back negative," confessed Keegan, "but rather than spoiling everyone's fun, we kept that quiet."

Keegan made another 41 appearances during his debut



"WE WENT ON PRE-SEASON AND THIS LAD CALLED KEVIN CAME – THAT WAS THE FIRST TIME WE'D EVER SEEN HIM"

campaign, scoring 11 goals in all competitions. Liverpool went potless for a sixth year running, but that all changed in 1972–73 when both Keegan and Toshack plundered 13 league goals apiece, helping Liverpool to a first title since 1965–66. Weeks later, they followed it up with a 3-2 aggregate triumph over Borussia Mönchengladbach in the UEFA Cup final; Shankly's paltry purchase from Scunthorpe bagged a brace against the Germans in a 3-0 first-leg romp.

By the 1973–74 season, Keegan was the Merseysiders' big-game player. After losing the league title to Leeds, he scored twice in the FA Cup final win over Newcastle – leading to an infamous Charity Shield scuffle with Billy Bremner. Keegan and the Scot received three- and eight-match bans respectively.

Little could King Kev lower in his gaffer's estimations, however. "Shankly loved Kevin like a son," smiles Callaghan. "They adored each other. Bill made everybody feel special. He didn't like to play favourites with players, but their bond was clear."

By the mid-70s, Keegan's adulation had reached Beatles-level. The frontman was the driving force in Liverpool's second wave of dominance under Shankly, then improved further under the Scot's successor Bob Paisley. He was named the Football Writers' Association's Player of the Year in 1976 after the Reds' second league and UEFA Cup double in just four campaigns. Kev-mania was in full swing.





"Kevin came to Liverpool and developed into one of the best players – and one of the most famous men – in the country," says Callaghan. "He became the next superstar after George Best. You'd go out to the car park after the game and there'd be queues of fans waiting to see him, and he wouldn't head off until he'd signed every autograph."

Keegan was one of the first footballers to recognise his marketability. He opened shops and starred in advertisements, including for Brut aftershave with ex-boxer Henry Cooper.

In the summer of 1976, he appeared on ITV's *Superstars*. The show pitted athletes from a range of sports against one another in Olympic-style events, with Keegan hurtling off a bike and grazing his shoulder.

"The people in the stands have come here to see me make a fool of myself and they've got a right to it!" he insisted, before dusting himself down to win the steeplechase and claim overall victory. "It would never be allowed now," chuckles Callaghan. "But it was great entertainment."

Clockwise from above King Kev first ascended the throne at Anfield; ruling *Superstars*; "I'm not done with you yet, Bremner"

Keegan had also become key for England after making his debut against Wales in 1972. The '70s was a fallow period for the national team, however, as the Three Lions failed to qualify for either the World Cups in '74 and '78, or Euros in '72 and '76.

"Everyone was disappointed with the way things went," his England team-mate Mick Channon tells *FFT*. "People analyse why we didn't get to any tournaments, but ultimately we weren't f**king good enough."

The blow of missing out on Euro 76 would be softened by extra success at club level. A dozen goals helped to deliver the 1976–77 championship, before Mönchengladbach – regular Reds victims back then – were beaten 3-1 in Rome's European Cup final.

"Kevin was the man of the match," grins Callaghan. "He ran Gladbach defender Berti Vogts, his man marker, ragged that night."

Ten years after that trip in the back of Bob Nellis' van, Keegan had reached the pinnacle. But despite the relentless glory at Anfield, he was getting itchy feet.

"He admitted to us at the beginning of the European Cup-winning campaign that he was seeking a new challenge," reveals Callaghan. "Kevin rarely changed his mind, and made arrangements to leave us before the season's end. The way he played in that European Cup final was the perfect send-off."

PERMS AND POP SINGLES

If Keegan's decision to leave the European champions at the height of his powers raised eyebrows – "I'm not being vindictive," said Paisley, being vindictive, "but I wouldn't play a man for England that goes abroad" – his destination was even more bewildering. The 26-year-old didn't join another English club or European giant like Bayern Munich or Real Madrid. Instead he opted for Hamburg, who'd just finished sixth in the Bundesliga.

"We were all surprised Kevin came to HSV," laughs right-back Manfred Kaltz, who made 729 appearances for them between 1971 and 1991. "It was a big transfer for the club – he'd just won the European Cup so was a name on everybody's lips."

The size of the deal added to the surprise: £500,000 was a British transfer record and more than doubled Germany's. Just as the Beatles swapped the Mersey for the fortunes on offer by the Elbe, Keegan knew his worth.

"With God and Kevin Keegan with us, we will win," bragged Hamburg general manager Peter Krohn at the attacker's unveiling.

The sums rubbed Keegan's team-mates the wrong way, though. A group led by captain Peter Nogly knocked on HSV boss Rudi Gutendorf's door to share their reservations. "If you put the little English guy in, we don't want to work with you," they reportedly warned. "We don't need him and we don't like him."

Meanwhile, the England international was struggling to settle in northern Germany. He didn't know the language – admitting in one instance to visiting a hardware shop to buy a fuse then leaving with Christmas lights just to end the embarrassment for everyone – and began to suspect that his colleagues were intentionally not passing the ball to him.

Keegan told his wife that he felt "unusually vulnerable", but Kaltz believes he

was being sensitive. "No one tried to send him back to England or anything," he tells *FFT*. "He just had a hard time with the language. Everyone knew that Kevin would earn a lot of money, but I doubt anyone was envious of him for it."

Either way, emotions swiftly began to get the better of Keegan. During a winter friendly against VfB Lübeck on New Year's Day 1978, the Englishman snapped. Unhappy at the repeated roughhousing from an opposition defender, Keegan "knocked his lights out" before walking off the pitch.



An eight-week ban proved a turning point. Keegan got a call from an old pal. "Did you hit him properly, son?" Shankly cackled down the line. "Was it a left or a right hook? Did he stay down until the count of ten?" Keegan promised his former manager that he'd make a go of his career in the Bundesliga.

The first step was trying to master the language. "He put in a lot of effort and learned German very quickly," recalls Kaltz. "He needed a bit of time to settle but soon fitted in extremely well. In terms of commitment, attitude and ambition, everyone acknowledged that Kevin really was something special."

It didn't hurt that Hamburg's early season promise crashed in Keegan's absence – they won only two of the eight games he missed. Eventually, his team-mates began inviting him out and requested updates about when he could play again.

With the barriers now down, Keegan was touched to turn up for training one day and find full-back Peter Hidien sporting a perm. Keegan had pioneered the haircut to mixed early results. On first viewing, wife Jean burst out laughing, while Keegan's agent jokingly tried to disown him in public. Soon though, it was the footballer barnet du jour.

"I even tried it myself, but it was a complete disaster!" guffaws Kaltz.

At the end of Keegan's debut campaign, in which Hamburg finished 10th, Branko Zebec was appointed as manager. His impact was profound. A fierce disciplinarian, the Yugoslav believed his new squad needed toughening up, as punishing fitness sessions twice a day became the norm. "I'd never trained so hard in my life," groaned Keegan.

But there was method to Zebec's madness. Hamburg outran and outmuscled opponents to reach second place in the Bundesliga at Christmas, as Keegan – who hit a hat-trick against Arminia Bielefeld in HSV's last game before the turkeys came out – won his first Ballon d'Or in 1978. Die Rothosen went 13 matches unbeaten from March to a final-day defeat by Bayern Munich and cruised to the title, Keegan smashing 11 goals. Supporters affectionately dubbed him 'Mighty Mouse' due to his powerful yet diminutive frame, and Kaltz concedes the team became reliant on Keegan's ability in order to win.



"You could play him in midfield or up top," he explains. "He was strong in the air, a good dribbler, lightning fast and a great scorer, but he also worked incredibly hard defensively."

In true superstar form, Keegan celebrated Hamburg's victory by releasing a pop single. *Head Over Heels In Love* was a chart success, selling more than 200,000 copies in Germany and peaking at No.31 in the British rankings. "I actually thought that song was quite good," titters Mick Channon, who used to rib Keegan about his England team-mate's pop 'career'.



That Bundesliga crown would be Keegan's only silverware in Germany, although he did win a second successive Ballon d'Or in 1979, before Hamburg lost the 1980 European Cup final to Brian Clough's Nottingham Forest in Madrid. By then the headstrong Keegan had already revealed he was returning to England. Kaltz believes the intensity of Zebec's training sessions were a major factor in his decision.

"It meant we often lacked energy towards the end of matches," he says. "If he'd stayed, I think we would have been champions two or three more times."

AUF WIEDERSEHEN, KEV

It's difficult to imagine any Ballon d'Or holder coming to the same conclusion as King Kev. He spurned offers from Real Madrid, Juventus and the USA to join Southampton: a Second Division outfit as recently as 1978, but one who'd just come eighth in the top flight.

The move was all down to Saints manager Lawrie McMenemy, who called Keegan under the guise of needing some light fittings for his home. "They're only made in Hamburg, Kevin," he pleaded. "Could you bring a few back for me on your next visit?"

Cunningly, McMenemy soon turned the conversation to Keegan's plans once his Hamburg contract expired that summer.

"Lawrie was certainly a wheeler dealer," smiles Channon, into his 15th Saints year by then. "He knew what was going on and who was available. But Kevin was Europe's player of the year and probably the best footballer in the world. You don't often get characters like him at Southampton."

Keegan's hopes of winning a league title with a struggling club didn't pay off a second time. A talented-yet-ageing crop – including Channon, Charlie George and 1966 World Cup winner Alan Ball – did, however, help Saints to what was then their highest ever league finish of sixth in 1981 before ending seventh in Keegan's second season.

His 26-goal haul in 1981–82 bagged him the First Division golden boot as well as the PFA Player of the Year award. Saints may not have been top class, but in Channon's eyes his strike partner still was.

"Kevin was in his prime when he arrived at Southampton," he remembers. "He'd score goals, make goals and dictate games. If his name was on the team-sheet, you knew we were guaranteed another few thousand fans through the turnstiles."

Ahead of the 1982–83 season, the recently retired England captain – who'd

"HE WAS THE BEST PLAYER IN THE WORLD – YOU DON'T GET THAT AT SOUTHAMPTON"

finally made a World Cup outing that summer, albeit for 27 injury-doomed minutes against Spain – made another shock move. For once, though, fans could understand the destination.

Keegan's ancestors had emigrated from Ireland to Newcastle. His grandfather, Frank, was a local hero: a mine inspector who saved 30 lives following the West Stanley Colliery explosion in 1909. His father Joe and uncle Frank also spent their working lives down the pits and Saturdays at St James' Park. It was Keegan's homecoming, even as the Magpies languished in the Second Division.

Tens of thousands mobbed the stadium for Keegan's unveiling, and the queue for season tickets went around the block. Those frenzied scenes had nothing on Keegan's debut: a 1-0 win over QPR that featured a goal from the man himself. The 32-year-old celebrated by launching himself into the swaying support.

"I could have stayed there forever," he later reflected. The atmosphere Keegan inspired was only outshone by his brilliance.

"He was the messiah to those fans," former Newcastle and Northern Ireland midfielder David McCreery tells *FFT*. "But 100 per cent, he was still a world-class player. The rest of us went onto the pitch knowing he was going to be the difference."

For Keegan, mere adoration wasn't enough. He felt it was on him to take the club back to the top flight and was disappointed with the team's fifth-place finish in his debut season. But Peter Beardsley's arrival from Vancouver Whitecaps proved significant in year two – his work-rate and creativity allowed an ageing Keegan to prosper. By then 33, the messiah netted 27 goals in 41 appearances to steer Newcastle to promotion.

Leading the Magpies in the First Division, 13 years after his Liverpool bow, seemed the perfect end to a remarkable career. But King Kev had already chosen to retire.

"The players and the manager, Arthur Cox, tried to convince him to stay on," continues McCreery. "We knew what a huge asset he would be in the First Division. But when Kevin makes his mind up, there's no changing it."

McCreery rates Keegan as "one of the best I played with, alongside George Best and Paul Gascoigne." Kaltz calls him "a great player and a great person" – sentiments echoed by Channon. "Wherever Kevin went, he made a massive impression on everyone," he says of his friend. "He was top dog."

But Callaghan, like many Reds supporters, believes Keegan's playing legacy belongs to Anfield. "He's one of the greatest players in Liverpool history," he declares. "Kevin was the best. It's that simple."

Keegan's career may have been officially over in 1984, but for a man whose perm and pop career broke the mould for footballers, there was time for one more piece of pizzazz: a farewell friendly between Newcastle and Liverpool at a sun-kissed St James' Park. Fans held up banners reading "Auf Wiedersehen, Kev", as a teenage Alan Shearer watched in awe as ball boy.

"There were probably another 15,000 fans outside wanting to pay their tributes," says McCreery, who played in the 2-2 draw. "Kevin had brought good times back to the club and people wanted to thank him."

The most memorable moment came at the final whistle. A white helicopter landed on the centre circle as Keegan completed a closing lap of the pitch, a horde of supporters in tow. Then, wiping tears from his eyes, he climbed aboard his chariot.

A career that had started in the back of a van ended in a helicopter. Up it went, high above the stadium. Its passenger took one last look at the sea of black and white below then vanished into the blue, a fitting end for a player who had worked his way up from the bottom to touch the heavens.

Clockwise from below "Must. Touch. Perm"; with Our 'Enry; saying ta-ra to the Toon Army; a "quite good" single; loving Hamburg life; "but I'm a Saint"









THE HEYSEL STADIUM DISASTER

The tragedy that overshadowed the 1985 European Cup final was blamed on Liverpool fans, but the truth of what really happened wasn't quite so black and white

Words Rob Clark

In the 1980s, football fans weren't viewed in a favourable light by much of the country thanks to a combination of poor behaviour at matches and class politics. Sadly, a series of tragedies turned 1985 into an annus horribilis for football and did little to dissuade the public from viewing fans in this way.

First came a riot at the Luton Town vs Millwall on 13 March. Then, on 11 May came the Bradford City Stadium fire, in which 56 fans lost their lives. This horrifying incident had nothing to do with hooliganism, but some commentators nevertheless chucked it into the mix. Fans who tried either to pull down perimeter fencing to get to safety on the pitch or break through doors to the rear of the stands were mistakenly cast as rioters.

The Times described football at the time as "a slum sport played in slum stadiums and increasingly watched by slum people". But the issues of the mid-1980s stretched wider than football. There were riots in Brixton, Peckham, Toxteth and Broadwater Farm, plus civil unrest in Birmingham, Coventry, Wolverhampton and Bristol.

Against this backdrop was resentment among Liverpool fans over being targeted by Italian ultras during the previous year's European Cup final win over Roma. An hour before the 1985 European Cup final kicked off in Brussels on 29 May, groups of Liverpool and Juventus fans breached the neutral zone – intended as a buffer between the two sets of fans – and started fighting. Italian fans were pushed towards a wall, which collapsed. Some were killed in the crush, while others bore the brunt of the Juve fans trying to flee. There were 39 deaths and around 600 people injured.



UEFA were quick to lay the blame at the feet of Liverpool fans. Official observer Gunter Schneider declared the next day: "Only the English fans were responsible. Of that there is no doubt." An 18-month investigation by Belgian authorities reached the same conclusion.

The British Government sent Gerry Clarkson, then deputy chief of the London Fire Brigade, to investigate, and he came back with a different opinion – that many of the deaths were "attributable very, very largely to the appalling state of the stadium". Both Juventus president Giampiero Boniperti and Liverpool CEO Peter Robinson had urged UEFA to move the final, but the governing body refused to do so.

The aftermath included 26 Liverpool fans being charged with manslaughter; of those, 14 were convicted and given sentences of three years (though half of these were suspended for five years, allowing the perpetrators to return to the UK).

Two police chiefs who were in charge that night, plus the head of the Belgian FA, were also charged, the former two for the inadequate policing, and the latter for allowing tickets for the Liverpool section of the stadium – or at least the neutral buffer zone – to be sold to Juventus supporters.

Pressure mounted for England to be punished, which resulted in all English clubs being excluded from European competitions for five years. Liverpool alone were obliged to serve a further one-year ban.

What transpired at Heysel is an awkward subject for the club and its fans. No matter what the circumstances, the fact remains that they were inadvertently responsible for the deaths of another club's fans.


For some years, both Liverpool and Juventus tried to skirt round their responsibility. Maybe it's just too horrendous to face head-on. It can be argued that both clubs are ashamed that they went on to play the final, though at the time it was deemed the least worst option. Imagine if the game remained unplayed and tens of thousands of fans were let loose outside the stadium.

These days, the official club website carries tributes every May, and there is a memorial plaque (see above) at Anfield where flowers are laid on 29 May.

"I JUST WANTED TO MAKE EVERTON PAY"

Over 15 seasons and two spells, Ian Rush carved out an incredible legacy as Liverpool's greatest ever goalscorer – fuelled by a burning desire to punish his boyhood club...

Words Chris Flanagan


FROM THE
FourFourTwo
ARCHIVES

UEFA had handed Ian Rush the most prestigious task in club football, but they were getting worried.

Liverpool's record goalscorer had been asked to carry the cup onto the field ahead of the 2019 Champions League final between the Reds and Spurs at the Wanda Metropolitano in Madrid. There was just one problem: he was nowhere to be seen.

"UEFA phoned me asking, 'Where are you?'" Rush laughs now as he talks to *FourFourTwo*. "I said, 'Well... I'm walking on the motorway'. They said, 'You're what?'"

Of all the experiences during his 40-year association with Liverpool Football Club, this was one of the most bizarre. "There was me, John Henry the owner, Kenny Dalglish and Steven Gerrard on this coach from the team hotel – we'd decided to get to the stadium early to take in the atmosphere," continues Rush, who now works as a club ambassador. "But the driver took a right turn and the road was blocked off. He couldn't go forward, he couldn't go back, it was 35 degrees and we all had to get out on the motorway and walk.

"Everyone – John, Kenny, Stevie, me – was walking up this motorway and all the people in the cars were Liverpool fans. I don't think they could believe what they were looking at. When we arrived at the ground, UEFA came to get me. Peter Moore and John Henry had no idea where to go, so Peter said, 'Just follow Rushy, he's with UEFA now!' I got there with about two minutes to spare."

Television viewers would never have known. Rush carried the trophy onto the pitch before kick-off, then did the same after the game as a triumphant Liverpool lifted it for a sixth time.

"EVERTON DIDN'T WANT ME. I WAS GUTTED"

Rush twice won the European Cup as a player, successes that were powered by rejection. "I was a huge Everton supporter when I was a kid," he says. "My brother used to take me to matches – I was in the Gwladys Street End watching Bob Latchford when he scored 30 league goals in 1977–78. I didn't realise that the next player to get 30 league goals in a season would be me."

Not with Everton, though, as he dreamed back then, aged 16. Soon he was making his breakthrough with Chester City in the Third Division, but it wasn't enough to impress his beloved Toffees.

"I'll never forget the day that I was playing for Chester and the players came and told me that Everton manager Gordon Lee was there to watch me," he admits now. "I just remember seeing in the newspaper on the Monday him virtually saying that Ian Rush wasn't good enough for Everton. I may not have had the best of games, but he sort of said, 'We don't need him'. I was absolutely gutted. The team I supported didn't want me. Three months later, I joined Liverpool."

"WHEN LIVERPOOL FIRST CAME IN FOR ME, I SAID NO. I DIDN'T BELIEVE I WAS GOOD ENOUGH"

Below Latchford was Rush's hero; tasting European Cup success after seeing off Roma



Rush had caught the eye after scoring in a surprise FA Cup win at Newcastle during that 1979–80 campaign, when he netted 17 times in total. "Alan Oakes was the Chester manager – he'd played for Manchester City and said they were interested in me," says the 58-year-old. "Normally you'd think Alan would be swaying towards City, but he said, 'I think your best move would be Liverpool'.

"When they first came in for me, I turned them down as I didn't believe I was good enough for Liverpool. I was happy playing for Chester, scoring goals [in the Third Division], and I said no. Oakes said, 'Don't worry', but then in April he said Liverpool wanted to invite me to Melwood. Alan offered to come with me and asked if my dad – a big Liverpool fan – wanted to come. We all went, met Bob Paisley, and he showed us around. The way he sold the club was very normal – nothing was a big thing for him. Knowing Bob after that, that was the way he was.

"By then, the money that Chester would be getting from Liverpool was much different, and Alan said, 'Why don't you go and try it? If you don't like it, you can come back here'. So I decided to give it a go – I

thought, 'If I'm not good enough for Liverpool, I'll go back'."

The 18-year-old forward never needed to return. Signing for Liverpool for £300,000, a record fee for a teenager, he arrived with a point to prove. "The first thing in my mind was, 'I'm going to make Everton pay now – I'm going to prove it to them'," he reveals. "Fortunately, I managed to score quite a lot of goals for Liverpool."

That's certainly one way of putting it. To be precise, Rush scored a frankly ridiculous 346 times in 660 games, spanning two spells and 15 seasons. No other Liverpool player has ever topped 300 goals – only Roger Hunt, Gordon Hodgson and Billy Liddell have registered more than 200. Rush became one of the most clinical finishers in the history of British football.

He had to wait eight months for his Reds debut, though, and it took him time to gain the confidence required to become a star.

"When I first went into the Liverpool dressing room, I remember getting changed next to Ray Clemence and Alan Hansen," he recalls. "In there were the likes of Kenny Dalglish, Phil Thompson, Graeme Souness – I'd only seen them on TV before, so at first I was scared to say anything to them.

"For the first six months I did hate it there, because they were all taking the mickey out of me. But I realised afterwards that was the way to get you into it. You think these guys are superstars, but they're just normal people having a laugh and joke. Later we brought in Steve Nicol from Ayr United, and I was doing to Steve what they'd been doing to me – just banter to get him into it. That was why that dressing room was special.

"After about two or three months, I knew that I was as good as the other players, but the problem was breaking into the first team. Once I'd broken in and started scoring some goals, it was great."

He featured in the 1980–81 European Cup semi-final victory over Bayern Munich, as the Reds went on to win the trophy against Real Madrid in Paris. The following campaign Rush plundered 30 goals, forming a title-winning partnership with Dalglish.

"For me he's a genius – the greatest player Liverpool have ever had," beams Rush of the Scot. "I remember Kenny saying to me once, 'When I get the ball, you run into that space and I'll put it there'. I was thinking, 'You're not going to do that'. But he turned, never even looked and put the ball exactly where he said he was going to put it. I didn't make the run, and after the glare he gave me, I said, 'You don't have to tell me again!'

"I was pretty quick, but apart from having that yard of pace, I also had an extra yard as I knew what Kenny was thinking. I had two yards on the defender."

Rarely was that pace used to more lethal effect than in a 5-0 destruction of Everton in November 1982. "Bob Paisley came up to me before the game and said, 'You know, no one has scored a hat-trick in the Merseyside derby in nearly 50 years'," remembers Rush. "I just looked at him, thinking, 'What are you telling me that for?!' But he was so special at saying little things like that. I ran out there thinking, 'I'm going to score a hat-trick here'. I scored four that day – that was something special."

Special because he'd emphatically proved a point to his boyhood club, too? "Yes, 100 per cent," he says, smiling. "I just wanted to make Everton pay."

PFA Young Player of the Year that season, Rush won the PFA's main award a year later, thanks to the finest campaign of his career. In 1983–84, the Welshman scored 47 goals in 65 games as Liverpool secured the league, League Cup and European Cup. The forward converted his spot-kick as Roma were beaten on penalties in the Stadio Olimpico final.

In becoming the first player since his hero Latchford to post more than 30 league goals in England's top flight, Rush's tally of 32 that season also made him the first British player ever to win the European Golden Shoe.

"At the time I didn't really think about that, but when I look back now I'm made up about it," he admits. "I always remember Franz Beckenbauer saying that no one from the English or German leagues would ever win that Golden Shoe, because the leagues are too difficult, and others would always have someone scoring about 40 goals.

"When I won it, Marco van Basten was second and Nico Claesen [of RFC Seraing in Belgium] was third. Van Basten was at Ajax and, if I'm not mistaken, had been injured for half of the season! I was maybe a little lucky, but to be the first British player to win it is something I'm so proud of."

That he did it in such a successful season for Liverpool made it all the better. "It was Joe Fagan's first year in charge and I scored 47 goals," continues Rush. "A couple of years ago when Mo Salah scored 44, people were saying, 'He could break your record'. My name kept coming up and that was great, because the younger generation were saying, 'Who's this Ian Rush guy?' and started to Google me. I was trending in Egypt!

"Records are there to be broken, but I just thought, 'Please win a trophy if you're going to do it', because when I did it, we got three. Scoring 47 goals was amazing. I also scored two for Wales that season and a penalty in the shootout against Roma, so I always tell myself that I scored 50!"





Above Liverpool celebrate victory over Everton in the 1986 FA Cup final; after Rush bagged a brace **Below** The FWA Footballer of the Year Award was one of several in a stellar '83–84



LIKE LIVING IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY

Rush helped Liverpool to another European Cup final in 1985, but then came the tragedy of Heysel and the banning of English teams from continental competition. Domestically, the Merseysiders marched on in 1985–86, sealing the only Double in the club's history.

Victory in the FA Cup final – getting one over Everton again, with Rush netting twice at Wembley – maintained an incredible run. In his first seven years at Liverpool, the striker scored in 144 different matches... and never lost one of them.

"I signed in 1980, and the first time I ever scored and Liverpool lost was the League Cup final against Arsenal in 1987," he says. "We were 1-0 down to Everton in the 1986 FA Cup final, but I equalised in the second half and we won 3-1. I saw a quote from Gary Lineker

after saying, 'We knew when Rushy scored that they were going to win.' It must have got into opposition minds.

"That was my favourite game of my career, without doubt. My dream as a kid had been to win the FA Cup. I'd watch the final from 9 o'clock in the morning until 5 o'clock at night, then go out in the garden and pretend I was the one scoring in it. I'd won the league at Liverpool, the League Cup, the European Cup – everything but the FA Cup. To score twice in the final against your local rivals, with nearly 100,000 people watching at Wembley – my dream came true that day."

That summer, Rush was offered the chance to try his luck on the continent.

"Juventus were looking at me and Lineker, and they picked me," he explains. "Barcelona wanted to sign me as well, because Terry Venables and Mark Hughes were both over there at the time. But Juve were very keen to get in first and they agreed a deal with Liverpool."

While Lineker joined Barça for £2.8 million, Rush completed a £3.2-million move to Juventus – then a record fee for a transfer involving a British player. He spent the next year back on loan at Liverpool, however, before finally moving to northern Italy.

"Juve could only play two foreigners, and they already had Michel Platini and Michael Laudrup," says Rush. "They wanted me to go to Lazio for a season, but I said, 'No, either I come to Juventus or I stay at Liverpool for a season'. When I went there the following year, Platini said, 'You've come to the right club at the wrong time'. I said, 'Why's that?' He said, 'Because I'm retiring now – I would have made you loads of goals!'

"Juventus are a fantastic club, and all the best players in the world were playing in Italy – Diego Maradona at Napoli and Van Basten in Milan. But they had six new players when I arrived, and some of the ones they signed weren't up to Juve standards."

The Bianconeri slumped to sixth in Serie A in 1987–88. Rush was their leading scorer, but tight defences restricted the striker to seven goals – the Old Lady managed to net only 35 in 30 league games. "The fans were fantastic with me and sang my name every week," he recalls. "They just wanted to see you giving 100 per cent, and they knew I was. In a way, I think some Juve players weren't happy with that. I think if I went there now, I'd say, 'I'm Ian Rush, I'm the best player in the world' – because in Italy, it's about first impressions, like Diego Maradona at Napoli.

"I'd been brought up at Liverpool that it was a team game – if I'd said, 'I'm the best player in the world' there, the other players would have said, 'All right then, let's see how good you are by yourself'. But the mentality in Italy was different, and it took me four or five months to adapt."

It would be Rush's only season in Serie A before a £2.7-million return to Anfield. "Juventus signed too many foreign players and one had to go," says the Welshman.

"Laudrup nearly went to PSV but that fell through, so we had four foreigners, and Rui Barros and Oleksandr Zavarov weren't going anywhere [as new arrivals from Porto and Dynamo Kyiv respectively].

"Then Alex Ferguson rang me and wanted me to join Manchester United. When I got off the phone, I was in shock because Juventus hadn't told me I was for sale. I was thinking, 'Is this a wind-up?' When other clubs started phoning, I realised. Colin Harvey at Everton, Graeme Souness at Rangers, Bayern Munich and Roma all tried to sign me, too.

"But when Kenny Dalglish called, there was only one club I was joining. Fergie was great with me and I respect him, but I was never going to sign for Man United – I couldn't do that.

"I may have had a second thought about Everton, but I'd been with Liverpool too long – I was just happy to go back there. The grass isn't always greener on the other side, but Italy was a really good experience and I was





Below and left Platini reckoned his retirement in 1987 cost Rush "loads of goals" for the Old Lady **Bottom** Another FA Cup final, and another double to down Everton

"PLATINI TOLD ME, 'YOU'RE AT THE RIGHT CLUB AT THE WRONG TIME, BECAUSE I'M RETIRING'"

lucky to get the chance to go back to Liverpool so soon."

Rush's Anfield return produced his most famous quote – the one he never actually said at all. Still to this day, people ask him about the time he came back from Juventus and supposedly declared that Italy was 'like living in a foreign country'. "Kenny stitched me up!" laughs Rush. "When I signed, one of the reporters asked him what it had been like for me in Italy – he said it had been like living in a foreign country, and they laughed. Sometimes it's far easier for me to just say, 'Yes I did say it', because I spend ten minutes explaining the story!"

HE'LL BE COMING DOWN THE MOUNTAIN

After scoring 207 goals in his first spell at the club, Rush's second stint produced 139 more in eight seasons – even if it took him a while to get up to speed again.

"When I got back from Italy, I suffered with chickenpox and hepatitis," he says. "I'd been ordered to go back for Juventus' pre-season in Switzerland – after two days, they had me walking up mountains and I was exhausted. When I returned to Liverpool, I wasn't right – I played a couple of matches but told Kenny, 'I'm best going on the bench'. John Aldridge was in top form, so then it became difficult for me in 1988–89.

"If we hadn't have been playing Everton in the FA Cup final, I don't think Kenny would have named me as a substitute. Before that, I'd said that I might need to go back early for pre-season as I needed to get fit. Kenny said, 'It's Everton, I want you there'. It was a really hot day, I came on for Aldo, and in extra time Everton were exhausted – I think they came down to my level! That's why I was able to score two goals."



Above Rush won his fifth league title in 1989–90 **Below** He later signed for Leeds with one eye on being their boss

Rush's double delivered another Wembley victory – he captured three FA Cups and five League Cups during his glorious career. This one had been particularly poignant, coming just a month after the horrors of the Hillsborough disaster. "At Heysel, we didn't know what was going on at the time – Hillsborough was worse, as we knew there were fans in trouble," he says, reflecting on the two traumatic experiences. "We must always remember them [the 97 victims] – it's something that should never be forgotten. It was hard playing football after that, but Kenny was fantastic as manager. We went to the hospital and to funerals, and he said to us, 'Come back when you feel ready.'"

Rush collected a fifth league title in 1990 after netting 18 times. During the 1992–93 campaign, he overhauled Hunt as Liverpool's all-time leading goalscorer and also overtook Trevor Ford and Ivor Allchurch to become Wales' top talisman. Born in St Asaph, 25 miles west of Chester, Rush hit 28 goals in his international career – a record that lasted until Gareth Bale surpassed him in March 2018.

"We beat Belgium on the night that I broke the record – Ryan Giggs got his first goal for Wales, then I scored a header," smiles Rush. "To have that record was special, and when Gareth broke it, I rang him and said well done – he deserved it."

The highlight of Rush's international career was the winner against Germany in a 1991 European Championship qualifier. "Beating the world champions was an amazing night – those nights don't happen a lot for Wales," he remembers. "Jürgen Klinsmann asked to swap shirts with me afterwards, which made it extra special. I'm patriotic – the only regret I have is not reaching a major tournament with Wales. We were so close."

Sadly, Paul Bodin's missed penalty against Romania ended that dream in the last game of qualifying for the 1994 World Cup. Rush's Wales career came to a close in 1996, in the same year that he finally called time on his Liverpool days at the age of 34. His swansong was as a late substitute in the FA Cup final against Manchester United, but he could do little as a corner ricocheted off him and into

the path of Eric Cantona, who volleyed in the winner. Rush joined Leeds, then Newcastle.

"Robbie Fowler and Stan Collymore were blossoming [at Liverpool] – Roy Evans asked me to stay there for another year or two, but I didn't want to sit on the bench," says Rush. "I signed a two-year contract at Leeds. The deal I had with Howard Wilkinson was that in two years' time he was going upstairs and wanted me to take over as manager. That's the reason I went to Leeds.

"But two months into the 1996–97 season, Howard got sacked, Leeds changed owners, then George Graham arrived and didn't want me. Kenny Dalglish asked if I'd come and play for him at Newcastle and I said, 'All right, why not?' John Barnes was up there as well, and I can say I played in the Champions League [away at PSV]. Faustino Asprilla hit a hat-trick as we famously beat Barcelona 3-2 at St James' Park."

Rush finished his career with a brief spell at Sydney Olympic. "I'd never been to Australia. I only played three matches for them, but it was a great experience," he says fondly. "We won 2-1 in my first game, and that was the only time that I ever scored on my debut!"

RHINOS AND ROONEY

After a spell as striker coach with Liverpool, Rush did get his opportunity to manage in August 2004, tempted back to Chester by Stephen Vaughan three months after their promotion to the Football League.

"Gérard Houllier told me to take it," he says. "They were bottom of the league but I went there with my assistant Mark Aizlewood, an excellent coach, and we did really well. We went on an unbeaten run, I won manager of the month, then we were trying to make the play-offs. But my two best players were sold, Danny Collins and Kevin Ellison. I needed to sign a striker. The chairman was umm-ing and ah-ing, and it didn't happen, then he sacked my assistant without my knowledge. He wanted me to stay as manager, but on principle I said, 'I can't do that.' We parted on good terms but I couldn't stay."

Rush has never returned to management, despite an offer from the Indian league. He says he was offered two national team jobs in the past, but instead he took up a part-time role as the elite performance director for the Welsh Football Trust.

Months after his departure from Chester, he actually came close to a comeback on the pitch, at the age of 43. TNS wanted to recruit him for their Champions League qualifying tie against Liverpool, following the Reds' victory over Milan in Istanbul.

"The TNS chairman is a friend of mine and asked me to do it – he loves the publicity," chuckles Rush. "I did think about it, because playing against Liverpool and Steven Gerrard would have been brilliant. But I said, 'These players deserve a chance – whoever missed out for me, it wouldn't be very fair on them'."

He may not have made an unlikely playing return, but Rush remains a legend. In 2010, he even had a giant fibreglass rhino designed in his honour in Chester, painted with the trademark moustache he sported during his playing days. "I shaved it off when I finished playing, but everywhere I go – especially the Far East – people always ask, 'Where's your moustache gone?'" he says. "It's weird that so many people remember me for that – it became an icon!"

Rush remains iconic for another reason, too – he was the first football star to sign a deal with Nike, back in 1982. "Goalkeepers. The bad news is he wears Nike. There is no good news," read one of their early adverts under a picture of the Liverpool marksman.

"I was with Adidas, then a friend of mine, Jim Pearson, who played for Everton, went to work for Nike," explains Rush. "I signed and became the first contracted Nike player. I'm still with them now: I've been to their base in Oregon and done things with Michael Jordan – he was a gentleman. They've got a building named after him, and one named after me – I'm engraved in the wall as the first Nike footballer.

"Once, we went over there with the top five footballers – I took Wayne Rooney because he was very young, and he was fifth because he'd only just joined Nike. Number four was Mia Hamm, number three was Paolo Maldini, number two was Eric Cantona, and I was number one, which I found pretty amazing.

"The initial Nike Tiempo was based on my foot – they came, did some things with my feet, then went off and produced it. There's been another Tiempo since and, watch this space, there might be something else. I was so happy when they did a deal with Liverpool for this season. I've been waiting 40 years!"

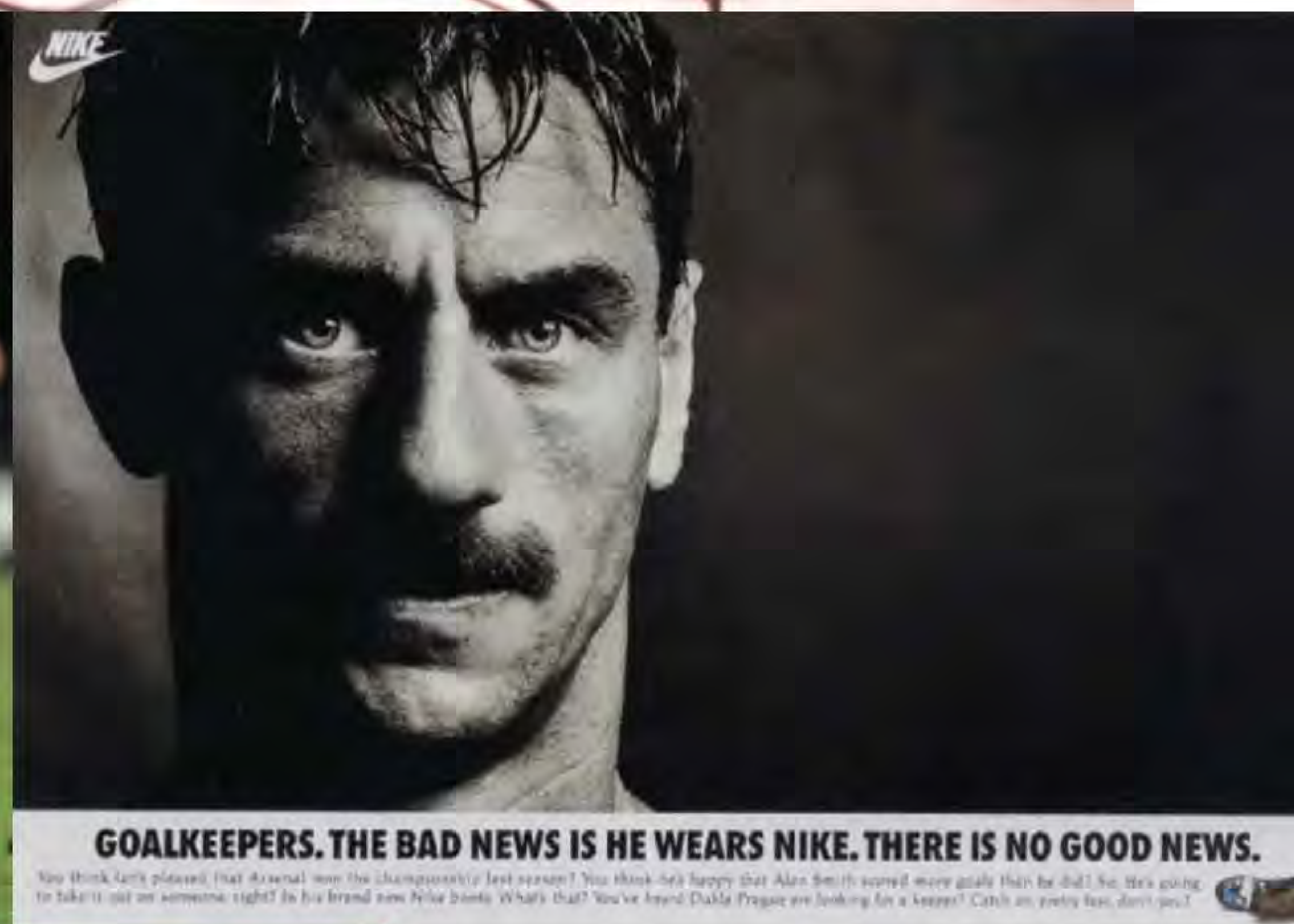
Now, Rush's two ambassadorial roles can work in unison. "I've got the best job in the world, travelling and promoting Liverpool – I've just agreed a new three-year contract," he says. "I first signed for Liverpool in 1980. Forty years on, I'm still signing for Liverpool."

There's no longer the same hesitation he felt as an 18-year-old arriving from Chester. Back then, he could never have imagined the journey that lay ahead. It's a journey that has continued long after retirement, one that took him to a Madrid motorway, hurrying to another appointment with the European Cup.

Ian is represented by the Avalon Sports Group







"IN HIS FIRST SEVEN YEARS AT LIVERPOOL, HE LOST NONE OF THE 144 GAMES HE SCORED IN"



Top Reds reunited at St James' Park **Above left** Rush got his only debut goal with Sydney **Above right** *That* 1982 Nike advert **Below** His spell in charge of Chester was briefly bright

THE HILLSBOROUGH DISASTER

97 innocent people dead. 27 years for the truth to be heard. Hillsborough is the worst establishment cover-up in British history...

Words Martyn Conterio



Left Due to police incompetence and a serious lack of crowd control, when a set of gates were ordered open to alleviate a crush developing outside the turnstiles, tragedy ensued

The roar of the crowd on match day can send shivers down the spine. Tens of thousands of men, women and children cheering on their beloved team with a cacophony of chants, songs and yells. Nothing can equal it; nothing comes close.

Football is often described as the 'Beautiful Game', and it is. The joys and sorrows of your team are shared by supporters at home and abroad in the days, weeks and months of a footballing season. Then it all starts again after the summer break. Every goal. Every chance missed. Every perfect pass. Every terrible pass. Reactions to these events are in sync. Other sports share a sense of togetherness, but not like football. There is a profoundness to the unity among football fans – often people from all walks of life united behind one passion and obsession: to see your heroes do well week in, week out.

There are times when football feels like the be-all and end-all. As manager Carlo Ancelotti put it: "Football is the most important of the least important things in life." Liverpool fans would delight in Bill Shankly's famous quote: "Some people believe football is a matter of life and death, I am very disappointed in that attitude. I can assure you, it is much, much more important than that." But not any more.

15 April 1989 is a date etched in history as a terrible day. What should have been just another match became a national trauma. Not only is Hillsborough a monumental tragedy, it's the story of how the establishment utilised its power for its own mendacious ends, advancing a false narrative to protect itself from prosecution and smear innocent people.

In the 1980s, Liverpool FC were unstoppable, the Reds hoovering up cups and league titles with a relentless hunger. As they did in 1988, Kenny Dalglish's team were to face Nottingham Forest in the FA Cup semi-final. But as anticipation and excitement whirled through the stands, a crush was developing outside the turnstiles at the West Terrace entrance, known colloquially as the 'Leppings Lane end'.

As the game edged closer to kick-off, people held up in traffic and who had arrived by train then ferried to the ground by coach were making their way to the stadium. There

was little police presence at the turnstiles – nowhere near the numbers expected – and those who were there would rapidly lose control of the situation. There was no organisation, no methods to corral people, or any implementation of a plan to break up the flow. Instead, it was allowed to turn into bedlam. Radioing to their commanding officers in the control tower overlooking the West Terrace, constables were met with indecision and silence. A plea was made to alleviate the pressure on the turnstiles by opening Gate C. More indecision followed. More crowding. More crushing. One officer lost his rag and did something a bobby is never supposed to do – he swore down the radio for all to hear: "Open the fucking gate or somebody will be killed."

How an inexperienced, wholly out of-his-depth chief superintendent named David Duckenfield ended up as match commander during the biggest event in South Yorkshire Police's calendar, with a third of the force assigned to cover it, began with a hazing prank. In late October 1988, a probationary constable was called out to a property in Ranmoor, Sheffield. He'd gone there after dark upon receiving information about a possible burglary. There, he was confronted by two masked men armed with weapons. The young copper was handcuffed, verbally abused and his photo taken as he cowered on the ground, fearing for his life. When the assailants removed their masks and began laughing hysterically, he realised that he had been on the receiving end of a cruel joke; a sort of initiation test. He was 'one of them', now. Not seeing the funny side at all, he went home traumatised, told his wife and made an official complaint. Heads rolled, unlike in the aftermath of Hillsborough. Four constables were sacked, and the head of F Division, located at Hammerton Road and in charge of match days at Sheffield Wednesday's ground, Chief Superintendent Brian Mole, a man with strong experience of policing games, was sent off to Barnsley for 'career development' on 27 March.

Sheffield news reporters attended a pre-match press conference held by Duckenfield, who immediately gave the impression that he wasn't up to the task when he couldn't even get the names of the teams right (he referred to Nottingham Forest as "Nottinghamshire"). Constable Martin McLoughlin, attending a briefing on the morning of the game, commented in 2015 television documentary *Hillsborough* that Duckenfield was the type who "liked the sound of his own voice". How ironic, then, that he froze at the moment he should have been giving orders and commencing the emergency disaster plan.

The crush outside the Leppings Lane turnstiles was getting worse. Duckenfield finally ordered Gate C open to take the pressure off the situation. Far from making things better, it caused one of the worst peace-time disasters in British history.

In previous years, the central tunnel was blocked off or closed, preventing fans from

Top right Fans are pulled out of the crowd and treated on the pitch by other supporters **Bottom right** An ambulance finally makes its way through the crowds and onto the pitch **Below** Fans are lifted clear of danger by those in the upper tier

"YOU SAW FACES PRESSED AGAINST THE FENCE AND PEOPLE SAYING, 'BRUCE, CAN YOU HELP US?'"







using it when full. Not this time. Due to poor signing and the confusing layout of the ground, fans poured in and headed straight down the tunnel. Nobody was there to stop them, or to tell them that the pens were full, which could have been relayed to constables in the concourse behind the stand.

Duckenfield said he could not see the Leppings Lane concourse or turnstiles from his position in the tower. But he could see almost directly into pens three and four, and the crush that was developing right in front of his eyes. It should have been obvious, but it wasn't to Duckenfield, because he assumed that's what happens at a football match: people are packed in like sardines and "find their own level", as he described it. Due to the lateral fencing between the terraces, fans could not move sideways. A deadly crush developed.

The noise of the crowd was punctuated by sounds that do not belong at a sporting event. They were more suitable to a battlefield: crying, groans, screaming, death sighs, then silence. Nobody is quiet at a football game – everybody talks, offering a running commentary with every kick of the ball, or they're busy singing in an effort to will their team on. If it wasn't immediately clear to all Liverpool and Nottingham Forest fans in the stands that something wasn't right in the lead-up to the 3 p.m. kick-off, then the sight of people clambering desperately over the metal fences at the West Terrace made this clear soon enough.

Liverpool players were initially dismayed to see fans running onto the pitch. Goalkeeper Bruce Grobbelaar went to fetch a ball and saw for himself what was happening. "You saw faces pressed against

WARNING SIGNS AT HILLSBOROUGH STADIUM



Hillsborough had come close to disaster a number of times in the years leading up to 1989

Football grounds represent not only a community but an identity. The location of a stadium is hugely important in cementing the identity of a team and its supporters. Hooliganism is a nightmare product of fandom, and the threat of it led to an obsession with 'containment' instead of safety.

As years pass, a stadium can be rendered obsolete because of increased demands on infrastructure. Some are deemed unfit for purpose. Hillsborough in 1989 was one such example. Here and there, features had been 'upgraded' over the years – crash barriers, radial fencing, seats, pens and gates – due to recommendations from several governmental reports, but what these places need most of all is a police force operating at their very best and stewards visibly deployed at all exits and entrances.

Hindsight can be cruel, as though Hillsborough was a ground primed for a devastating incident due to neglect (its safety certificate had not been updated since 1979).

During the 1981 FA Cup tie between Tottenham Hotspur and Wolverhampton Wanderers, held at Hillsborough, there was a crush in the Leppings Lane central pens. Thankfully on this occasion there were no deaths, with the police allowing fans who had climbed the fencing to watch the game from the side of the pitch and behind the goalmouth.

Overcrowding was reported at the 1988 Liverpool v Nottingham Forest FA Cup semi-final tie at Hillsborough and also during a 1987 match when Leeds United played Coventry City. But the warning signs were not heeded. If they had been, 97 fans would not have lost their lives.

HILLSBOROUGH STADIUM

The crush occurred in the Leppings Lane stand, which was allocated to Liverpool supporters. A sudden influx of 2,000 fans led to people being forced against metal fencing

SOUTH STAND

4
3.00 p.m.
The game begins. Fans caught in the crush attempt to climb over the fences. There is zero leadership or direction from senior officers.

PEN THREE

PEN FOUR

POLICE CONTROL ROOM BETWEEN STANDS

6
3.06 p.m.
Referee Ray Lewis stops the game at 3.05 p.m. The shocking magnitude of the disaster is about to be revealed.

5
3.05 p.m.
A crush barrier in pen three collapses, causing those at its front to fall. Most of the deaths occurred in pen three.

3
2.52 p.m.
The central tunnel leading to pens three and four is open, with the pens already twice over their capacity. From this moment, the horror is unavoidable.

GATE C

LEPPINGS LANE ENTRANCE

STANDING STILES

SEATING STILES

2
2.47 p.m.
A request comes in at 2.47 p.m. to open Gate C in order to relieve the crush. Chief Superintendent David Duckenfield gives the command at 2.52 p.m.

1
2.30 p.m.
A crush develops outside the ground due to the small number of turnstiles and the large crowd. Police coordination and crowd control is virtually non-existent.

the fence and people saying, 'Bruce, can you help us?'" When two blokes approached Liverpool's captain, Alan Hansen, he started to castigate the distraught figures for invading the field of play. "Al, there are people dying in there," they told him. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. The game was stopped at 3.06 p.m.

Hillsborough claimed 97 lives in total, with hundreds more injured. For survivors, physical ailments faded to be replaced by psychological ones. Feelings of guilt and terror took root. Night-times were the worst: the dreams, the cruel replays of panic and an all-consuming fear.

Yet neither was there time to mourn or make sense of what had gone on, for survivors were recast in new life-long roles as victims of a disaster but also told they were responsible. In reality, it was caused by South Yorkshire Police's incompetence, mismanagement and negligence.

Hillsborough would provide a catalogue of excessive and often needless post-event horrors. Families and survivors wanted answers, but they were denied. Instead, an alternative but powerfully convincing lie was invented by South Yorkshire Police, aided and abetted by the press. Compassion was limited. Lies were treated as indisputable facts: Liverpool fans were to blame and must accept their part and stop going on about it all the time. "Liverpool people killed Liverpool people," as Nottingham Forest manager Brian Clough put it.



Supporters attempt to lift friends and strangers out from the crowd

"HILLSBOROUGH WOULD PROVIDE A CATALOGUE OF POST-EVENT HORRORS"

The smears and cover-up began right away, all thanks to Chief Superintendent Duckenfield. In years to come, the world would learn how evidence was concealed, that constables' statements were vetted and rewritten to remove all criticism of South Yorkshire Police's senior officials; witness statements were signed by officers or investigating teams without actually having been present at the interview; a video camera that looked straight into the pens – with a powerful zoom lens – was said not to be working (it was) and tapes went missing. This was a cover-up by corrupt officers whose arrogance and behaviour in the face of catastrophic failings was to deny it wholesale. No ifs, buts or maybes. South Yorkshire Police, public servants, deemed themselves to be the masters.

FA executive Graham Kelly made his way into the control tower after seeing the game brought to a halt. He asked what was going on, and Duckenfield informed him that Liverpool fans had forced open Gate C, causing the subsequent mayhem in pens three and four. In a few brief words he crafted a devastating myth, one that held steadfast for years and shaped South Yorkshire Police's response to the disaster.

The shadow of the Heysel disaster provided the perfect cover for South Yorkshire Police to behave the way they did towards Liverpool fans. The 1985 European Cup tragedy saw 39 Juventus supporters killed by a collapsing wall when some Liverpool supporters rushed at opposition fans in a section supposedly reserved for neutrals. Several bitter skirmishes over the course of an ill-tempered day led to a deadly end result (in another football stadium that was not fit for purpose).

The political establishment and media were fixated on football hooliganism during the 1970s and '80s and believed it to be endemic. At a time when it was still seen predominantly as a working man's game, supporters were often tarred with the same hooligan brush. The reality was very different, and neither was Liverpool's home or travelling support known for football violence, despite what happened at Heysel. 'Drunk, ticketless fans caused Hillsborough' was repeated chapter and verse by the establishment and wormed its way into popular opinion. There is evidence that some fans knew what was coming. A BBC camera captured a group of men waving their tickets to the camera. Their protest was in vain. Duckenfield's lie rapidly spread to the media, and the BBC's coverage repeated the claim that "a gate had been broken open at the Leppings Lane end of the ground, enabling non-ticket holders to flood in."

Yet Duckenfield's lie was known from the start; it just wasn't treated as one. In a television interview given to the press by Kelly, he explained that he'd heard "two versions". One is the forced gate scenario (Duckenfield's lie), and the other that somebody in a position of authority had ordered the gate open (the truth).

South Yorkshire Police moved like lightning to get their version of events onto the airwaves and into the newspapers. Sheffield's White's News Agency fabricated false reports about drunk, ticketless fans picking the pockets of the dead and urinating on police trying to rescue those in need. One 'credible' source was Irvine Patnick, MP for Sheffield Hallam, who told officers in the makeshift mortuary located in Hillsborough's gymnasium "I spoke to many policemen." He continued: "They told me they were hampered, harassed, punched, kicked and urinated on by Liverpool fans." The MP also stated that "they had no reason to lie", and "there is no doubt in my mind it is true." White's News Agency's make-believe fantasies were the source of *The Sun*'s front-page headline, arguably the most controversial in British press history.

FACTS

54,000 fans attending the match

1,122 Number of police on duty

10 The age of the youngest victim, Jon-Paul Gilhooley

38 Number of victims aged 19 and under killed

766 Total number of non-fatal injuries

90+7 male victims, female victims

10,100 Leppings Lane terrace capacity

Images Adrian Mann(illustration), Rex/Shutterstock



Many in Liverpool have boycotted *The Sun* due to its coverage of Hillsborough





CREATING THE 'SELF-PITY CITY'

What made the smear campaigns and police corruption so successful for so long was the self-pitying victim status bestowed upon Liverpool. A once thriving world port in decline for decades, a common view was that people in the city were somehow their own worst enemy. Militantly left-wing in a time of Thatcherism, with unemployment figures through the roof, a sort of collective antagonism and snobbery was aimed at the city. "Scousers would blame anybody but themselves" was de rigueur rhetoric.

The media took a major role in shaping this viewpoint via columns and 'thinkpieces' – not just in right-wing newspapers but also in more traditionally left-leaning broadsheets like the *Guardian* and *Observer*. Sympathy and understanding was in short supply. It was as if the rest of the country turned their shoulder against Liverpool, patronisingly telling them to buck up and stop whining about their lot.

Not only had Hillsborough been lumped with the Heysel tragedy as examples of a city unable to accept blame; when James Bulger was murdered in 1993, the city was in the headlines again. Here was another opportunity to stick the knife in, to repeat the charges and condemn what they saw as a maudlin outpouring, not a strong community that lived together and suffered together in times of economic strife and misery.

In 1993, a *Sunday Times* article written by Jonathan Margolis, headlined 'Self-Pity City', went to town: "Liverpool culture seems nevertheless to thrive on defeatism and hollow-cheeked depression with a cloying mawkishness."

There are plenty of examples like that, all willing to put the boot in, all taking an unsuspecting part in an establishment cover-up because they refused to believe what Liverpool was telling them: Hillsborough was a disaster caused by those with a duty of care.

Emboldened by what he had been told, editor Kelvin Mackenzie sat in his office and dreamed up 'The Truth'. Staff were uneasy and others plain disgusted. But their boss was adamant that they were running with it in the morning's paper. *The Sun*, however unwittingly, was playing the role of South Yorkshire Police's PR firm.

The Star, a Sheffield newspaper, offered perhaps the only accurate report from the ground that afternoon. In its special Sunday edition covering the tragedy, it highlighted Duckenfield's decision to open Gate C, calling it "a moment of madness." Lord Justice Taylor, in charge of the first inquiry, offered a damning verdict of South Yorkshire Police while managing to reach all the wrong conclusions. Duckenfield's blatant fabrication was obscured by a smear campaign that allowed prejudice and opinion to ride roughshod over the facts.

Survivors were treated like suspects. In a vile abuse of power, South Yorkshire Police used computer records to check the backgrounds of the victims. Was there anything they could use to impugn the dead or help the cause in protecting the force against possible recriminations?

Alcohol played no part in Hillsborough, but coroner Dr. Karl Popper's decision to take the blood sugar levels of all victims – including children – further provided ammunition for the smears. The 2012 inquiry later found that there was no rationale or precedent for Popper's action. What emerged was a clear bias, a type of class warfare aimed at the city of Liverpool – even though Hillsborough was a nationwide tragedy affecting both middle- and working-class people – and a police force unwilling to accept that they caused the disaster when they knew they were at fault.

Of course fans had been drinking – football is a social event. Only in the fevered world of 1980s hooliganism would drinking beer before a match be seen as problematic. It demonstrated a lack of establishment understanding of a country's pastime and culture. "How much did you have to drink?" became a line of questioning by officers taking statements. "How much did they have to drink?" if the person being interviewed was a relative of the dead.

A few people might well have been drunk on the day, but nobody – fans or constables – witnessed anything that seemed out of the





> "SOUTH YORKSHIRE POLICE USED COMPUTER RECORDS TO CHECK THE BACKGROUNDS OF THE VICTIMS"

Above A fan is carried to a waiting ambulance on advertising hoardings
Left Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher with aides and South Yorkshire Police seniors at Hillsborough
Right Families celebrate the unanimous verdicts, which finally proved Liverpool fans did not cause the disaster

ordinary or that they thought warranted intervention. Being drunk at a football match does not make you a criminal unless you act criminally. Nobody acted like a criminal that day. But the idea set in regardless: a booze-fuelled mob without tickets violently pushed their way into the ground. Photographs taken on the day do reveal confiscated drinks in bins dotted by turnstiles. They are predominantly soft drinks; cans of Coke, the odd can of lager among them.

Hillsborough was an FA Cup semi-final that turned into a tragedy that then became an establishment cover-up that disgraced the nation. It threw into question everything people are led to believe about those with a duty of care towards their well-being. It also proved that justice is a malleable concept when those with power are criticised or in the wrong, destroying the reasonable assumption that those in the wrong will be held to account and punished.

It's sadly often the case that when those in power make a devastating mistake they will do all they can to obfuscate, finger-point and ultimately avoid accepting responsibility. This is where establishment arrogance and backside-covering, for want of a better phrase, comes into play. Suddenly, the goal posts shift and the rule of law and order become amorphous and re-moulded to fit a new story or perception. Blanket denials become cast-iron, irrefutable facts.

Hillsborough's story is an example of what happens when those in charge screw up spectacularly and then refuse to carry the can until they are exposed after decades of perseverance for their crimes. 'You'll Never Walk Alone' isn't just a pre-match Anfield tradition; its lyrics post-Hillsborough attained an immense symbolic power. "When you walk through a storm, hold your head up high, and don't be afraid of the dark." To put it bluntly, the political establishment and media picked on the wrong city.

The legal maxim *Fiat justitia ruat caelum* (Let justice be done though the heavens fall) was made a mockery of by South Yorkshire Police, the West Midlands Police investigative team and the Home Office. South Yorkshire Police stuck to their story about 'tanked up' fans and hooliganism, besmirching the dead all over again. This behaviour, accepting failings one minute and then repeating old lies the next, is astonishing today.

The idea that those with a duty of care towards the public would seek to manipulate the facts in an effort to hide their mistakes is difficult for the British public to accept. Britain is a nation with an at times egregious respect for the establishment, a deference that works in the establishment's favour when it makes a grave error.

Families, survivors and campaigners were treated with a callousness and disdain that takes the breath away. Only, the Hillsborough campaigners refused to shut up. They wanted answers, and they were going to get them, whatever it took.

In the end, 27 years passed before a fresh inquest began in Warrington, Cheshire, in 2014. Concluding in 2016, its findings completely exonerated fans and found South Yorkshire Police fully responsible for the disaster. The jury answered 'yes' to 14 key questions regarding South Yorkshire Police's responsibility. They were in breach of their duty of care, and that breach led to 97 people being killed. Those deaths were due to 'gross negligence'. Now, the nation and the wider world knew 'The Real Truth', as *The Sun*'s tautological headline had put it a few years earlier.

While the fans at Hillsborough had finally been absolved of any blame at the inquest, the struggle for the truth was far from over. The families of the victims began a campaign for accountability. In June 2017, six people were charged with various offences including manslaughter by gross negligence, misconduct in public office and perverting the course of justice. However, despite the inquest ruling that the 97 deaths were unlawful, only one of the six, Graham Mackrell, Sheffield Wednesday's secretary at the time of the disaster, was prosecuted for a safety offence and received a fine. The other five, including David Duckenfield, were found not guilty.

Margaret Aspinall, whose 18-year-old son, James, was killed at Hillsborough, called the outcome a "cover-up of the cover-up of the cover-up", adding: "We've been put through a 32-year legal nightmare looking for the truth and accountability. Now they're saying the police were allowed to change statements. The legal system in this country really has to change."

American author William Faulkner once wrote, "The past is never dead. It isn't even past." Hillsborough proves it.





THE SPION KOP

This famous stand witnessed so many iconic moments **Words** Steve Wright



The etymology of the term 'Spion Kop' has dark connotations. Named for the hilltop where a fateful battle was fought in 1900 during the Second Boer War, many stadia incorporated its name into their stands, allowing it to bear witness to battle of a rather different kind.

While Anfield's Kop wasn't the only one in British football, it was undoubtedly the most iconic. This can in part be attributed to the impact the battle had on the local population – a large number of the 300 casualties were from the city of Liverpool or the areas surrounding it, prompting *Liverpool Echo* journalist Ernest Edwards to christen it in honour of those who fell on the slopes of Spioenkop.

Built to commemorate the club's league championship win of 1906, it's easy to see why the Kop was so named: steep and imposing, just like its real-life counterpart, it loomed large over the Anfield pitch. Having grown rapidly since the club's foundation in 1892, Anfield's capacity had been steadily built up over years to both accommodate the increased level of support and reflect the club's heightened stature. While the capacity would continue to expand over the years, for the first time, with the establishment of the Kop, Anfield felt complete.

Indeed, in 1928 the Kop was expanded even further, being altered from banking to terracing, in the process bringing its capacity up to over 30,000, with a roof also being added. With just one tier, it was nonetheless a giant of a stand. The addition of the topmast from the SS Great Eastern – one of the first iron ships – gave it extra character.

Those who inhabited the Kop felt like part of a community, united by a shared love. This didn't go unnoticed by the club's hierarchy, with Bill Shankly noting, "If you're a member of the Kop, you feel as though you're a member of a big society, where you've got thousands of friends all about you. They're united and loyal."

With the incredible atmosphere it generated, Anfield became a place that other teams feared to go, such was the noise emanating from the Kop. Every home side relies on their fans to generate an atmosphere, and with the Kop, Liverpool had a vital tool in their arsenal. When the crowd were at their most boisterous, it was as if the noise was both on top of and all around you. Playing host to a vocal mass waving red-and-white scarves, it became as much of an icon as any of the players or managers who set foot in Anfield.

The number of classic nights the Kop bore witness to are numerous. Some would point to the 1977 European Cup quarter-final against St Etienne, in which David Fairlough's last-minute equaliser helped to keep the club's dream of European domination alive, as the most memorable. Others recall the 2-0 win at home to Manchester United courtesy of goals from Ian Rush and Mark Walters in April 1992, a result that derailed United's hopes of winning the First Division title as Leeds pipped them by four points. To the Anfield faithful, a future without the Spion Kop was unimaginable, but the beloved stand's fate had already been sealed over two years before Liverpool halted Fergie's charges.

In the wake of the Hillsborough disaster of 1989, increased scrutiny was placed on stands like the Kop, with its terraced masses packed closely together. Published in response to Hillsborough in 1990, the *Taylor Report*, among other things, recommended the removal of standing in favour of all-seater stadiums. The Football League followed this suggestion, bringing in legislation that all clubs in their top league were to comply with this by August 1994, a decision that spelled the end for the Spion Kop, which was consequently demolished in the summer of 1994. Sadly, its curtain call wasn't marked by a victory, with the final game played out in its shadow ending in a 1-0 defeat to Norwich.

While the rebuilt, seated stand retained the original stand's name and imposing character – it was still one tier, and it was still situated at the Anfield Road End – its capacity was vastly reduced in the process to 12,390, less than half that of its previous incarnation.

While the Kop might not be what it once was, it remains an important part of the furniture. Who can forget the tense semi-final victory against Chelsea en route to winning the 2005 Champions League, or the breathtaking comeback against Barcelona in 2019, triumphs helped in no small part by a roaring Kop.

It may now be almost 30 years since the Spion Kop was brought down, but its legacy lives on in the hearts and minds of a fanbase that revelled in shouting their team on from its towering frame. It might be gone, but it will never be forgotten.

Interview James Hilsum
Portrait Guardian / eyevine

"I peed in a bottle, poured it all down the posts at Anfield, then Liverpool went on an unbeaten run and won the Premier League"

BRUCE GROBBELAAR

Few people have had a life quite as eventful as Bruce Grobbelaar. Born in South Africa before growing up in Rhodesia, now known as Zimbabwe, Grobbelaar fought in a civil war, headed to Vancouver to take on Pele & Co, then made his home in Liverpool via a spell as a goalscoring goalkeeper at Crewe.

The jelly legged hero of Liverpool's 1984 European Cup final victory over Roma also won six league titles, three FA Cups and three League Cups in his 13 years at Anfield, which produced a total of 628 appearances, the ninth highest tally in the club's history. After making his debut in 1981, he didn't miss a game for five years, playing 310 consecutive matches.

All of that followed a bizarre journey from Vancouver to Merseyside, then a tough first six months as Liverpool's first-choice shot-stopper, which almost brought a premature end to his time at the club. It wasn't the only difficult period throughout the gloveman's long career: Grobbelaar successfully fought allegations of match-fixing during the 1990s, having previously witnessed horrifying tragedies at Heysel and Hillsborough.

Now 64, he's ready to discuss his life in football with *FourFourTwo*, after an unexpected playing comeback in 2018, and his successful mission to overcome a curse and help his beloved Liverpool finally lift the Premier League trophy two years later...

Were you really offered a US baseball scholarship when you were young?
Andy Hampton, Ohio
Yes I was. I played for Ralyton Braves as a kid in Rhodesia, then got scouted because baseball came to Africa with the American missionaries – it was one of the top sports in Rhodesia. I joined the army, then when I came out they continued to watch me. North Adams State College in Massachusetts offered me a scholarship at 19. I chose football. I felt it was less advantageous to go back to school after the army, so I said no. At the time I was playing football for Durban, the place where I was born.

What was it like working with a witch doctor at Highlanders in Rhodesia?
Emma Jackson, Reading
When we won, he was the hero. When we lost, the club tried to fire him! If he didn't give us good muti [traditional African medicine or magic charms], he was the one being chased by fans. On one occasion, the witch doctor told me to strip naked and stand around a tree with all the other players. He splashed water over us, told us to get our gear on, then we went to the stadium and won. He was the hero, not the players!

You were involved in the Rhodesian War. What were your experiences?
Hamid, via Instagram
It wasn't something I signed up for. We signed up to do national service as patrolmen on the border; six months on, the real war started and we were a mobile unit instead. We were used as a fire force; you went around as four men, and if there was any contact you'd get lifted up by a helicopter and dropped into the middle of the action.



What was South Africa like to play in during the 1970s amid apartheid?
John Wilson, Peterborough
I started my career in Rhodesia, and while they were neighbouring nations, Rhodesia and South Africa had vastly different beliefs on how their leagues should operate. In Rhodesia, there was a white league and a black league. It didn't matter if you were white or black – you could put yourselves in the white league, or the white teams could go in the black league. At Salisbury Callies, I played in an all-white team in a black league. Then I played for a black team and was the only white in the team. But South Africa was different. It had three leagues: a white league, a black league and a coloured league, which included Indian and black. Durban City joined a coloured league because the white one was disbanding. As whites, they looked at you differently, but they treated you fine if you played well. If you didn't, you'd be under some strain.

How close did you come to signing for West Bromwich Albion?
Liam Kerry, Dudley
I received a draft letter from the army in South Africa, so a friend that I stayed with asked people in the UK if I could have a trial there. They asked Wolves and West Brom, where Ron Atkinson and his assistant Colin Addison gave me a chance. I arrived in July, met the lads at a hotel in Oxford for pre-season, then the next morning we were doing a cross-country course up and down hills. When we finished the circuits, the players got together and said, "Listen, if you lap us again, we'll injure you and you won't be able to play – don't take the mickey out of us!" Ron and Colin saw my potential in running and asked me to stay for five months. They tried to sort a work permit, without success.

You moved to Vancouver Whitecaps in 1979. How was it facing Pelé and Johan Cruyff?
Frank Morton, Victoria
In the first year I played three games, but the first was against LA Aztecs and Cruyff was in the team. I also came up against Pelé at New York Cosmos, and they had several other stars like Giorgio Chinaglia, Johan Neeskens and Franz Beckenbauer. It was daunting playing against those legends, but I did well. I saved a Cruyff penalty, and one of my team-mates told me that Cruyff said, "This goalkeeper is going somewhere."



TEAMS (PLAYER)

1973–74 Highlanders
1975 Chibuku Shumba
1976 Highlands Park
1977–78 Durban City
1979–81 Vancouver Whitecaps
1979–80 Crewe (loan)
1981–94 Liverpool
1993 Stoke (loan)
1994–96 Southampton
1996–97 Plymouth
1997 Oxford
1997 Sheffield Wednesday
1997–98 Oldham
1998 Chesham
1998 Bury
1998 Lincoln
1999 Northwich Victoria
2002 Hellenic
2007 Glasshoughton Welfare

COUNTRY (PLAYER)

1977 Rhodesia
1980–98 Zimbabwe
2018 Matabeleland

TEAMS (MANAGER)

1997 Zimbabwe
1998 Zimbabwe
1999–01 SuperSport United
2001–02 Hellenic

FROM THE FourFourTwo ARCHIVES







Few players join Crewe on loan from Vancouver. How did that happen?
Sally Roberts, Nantwich
Before that, I never knew that I could apply for an ancestral visa in the UK, because my great grandfather was in the Royal Fusiliers. Once I realised that, I could get a work permit. Vancouver was a beautiful place for a 19-year-old to be, but going to Crewe – goodness gracious me! We lived in the dormitory in the Royal Hotel – me and two other players stayed in the loft. Later, having been at Crewe for a while, I didn't clock that a guy with a flat cap was following me for three weeks. He'd watch what I ate at restaurants, what I drank at the hotel bar and what time I went to bed. It was only when I arrived at Liverpool and saw him that I found out he was one of their scouts – he'd been sent by the club to monitor me.

Clockwise from right Bruce's clowning around peeved Paisley; League Cup glory in 1982 gave Liverpool the impetus to win the title; Grobbelaar had big gloves to fill at Anfield; "Do you ever get the feeling you're being watched?"; 'Spaghetti legs' ruled Rome in '84



You scored a goal in your last game for Crewe. What was the closest you came after that – were there nearly any Alisson-at-West Brom moments?
Paul Incles, via Facebook
I can set the scene of that Crewe goal: manager Tony Waddington came up to me before the game and said, "We've done the business." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "We're not 92nd in the league any more." He said he'd make me captain and that if we won a penalty, I could take it if we were two goals in front. We got a penalty when we were one goal up, but I grabbed the ball out of the striker's hands. The York goalkeeper said, "Don't make me look like a fool – which way are you going?" I said, "Dive to the right." He dived low to the right, I hit the ball a little higher and it went in off the crossbar. Thank goodness for that – an inch higher and I'd have had to scramble back. The ball would have landed on the halfway line! [*Laughs*] The nearest I came to scoring after that was in a pre-season friendly against Home Farm. It was very windy, I punted the ball upfield, it bounced over the keeper's head and hit the bar.

How did you end up joining Liverpool?
Liam Barton, Hoylake
I met Bob Paisley and Peter Robinson, the club secretary, in Birmingham. They asked if I'd like to play for Liverpool and I said, "Absolutely". They said, "Thanks, you can go" and that was that. I knew they were interested, but I never knew how much bureaucracy they had to go through to sign me. Both the FA and British Government really didn't want me there, because I was Rhodesian on a South African passport. It was easier to enter Britain on a South African passport, as Rhodesia had unilaterally declared independence. The FA also said there were a lot more British-born goalkeepers just as good as me as an argument to stop the move. It took 18 months to two years to secure a work permit. Bob Paisley was a big figure in that – he really wanted me to come to Liverpool. I only found out how much of a struggle it was when I researched my book and discovered all the letters of correspondence between Liverpool and the Home Office.

Was it hard to adjust when you first arrived at Liverpool? Did anyone help to make it easier for you?
'Barneyjack_13', via Instagram
They bought me for £250,000, a then record for a goalkeeper, but when I landed in London, I hoped someone might pick me up at the airport. They didn't. I got to Manchester, then hoped they might pick me up as it was 36 miles down the road. They didn't. I phoned the club, and all the lady said was, "Do you know where Liverpool is?" and hung up. I got to Anfield and the gates were shut, so I drove around trying to get into town – there was no availability at the hotels. I eventually went to the Adelphi Hotel, asked a woman if she had any rooms and she said no. But as I turned around I saw Tom Saunders [Liverpool's youth development officer] give Bob Paisley a £1 note and say, "I didn't think he'd get here!" Bob told me why he did it – he wanted to see if I could make my way to Liverpool, to tell him something about my character. Bob Scott, my old captain at Crewe, urged me not to buy a house in Liverpool – he said I should buy one near his place in Wales, to give me a base away from the distractions of the city. He said, "If you don't buy a home in Wales, you could end up just like George Best." I lived there until an incident before the Intercontinental Cup in Tokyo. We were supposed to be at Liverpool Airport for a certain time, but it had snowed the night before and was a challenge to get there. I was 15 minutes late. As I ran into the airport, I saw a bus – Ronnie Moran was on it

yelling, "Hey dickhead, come on!" I got on and Bob Paisley asked, "Where do you live?" I said I lived in Wales and he replied, "Wales?! Get yourself a place in Liverpool. You're lucky we hadn't taken off – if we had, you'd never have played for Liverpool again."

How daunting was it, not only joining a fantastic Liverpool team, but also having to take over from the legend that was Ray Clemence?

David Gillespie, via Instagram

I was taking over from the best keeper in the world, in my opinion, so it was daunting. I got there in March 1981, played in three reserve games, then went to Hawaii over the summer and found out Ray had joined Spurs. When I got back, there was myself and Steve Ogrizovic, the keepers that played the last six matches for the reserves – he played the home games, I played the away games. We were fighting it out, but I played all the pre-season games. Steve didn't like it and told Bob Paisley he should be playing – Bob said that he could play every weekend... but for Shrewsbury, because Liverpool had swapped him for a keeper called Bob Wardle who became my understudy.

My debut was at Wolves and we lost 1-0. For the first six months I struggled – the price tag weighed heavily on my shoulders. I thought it may have been because of my exuberance, including walking on my hands and swinging from the crossbar. It wasn't going well until Boxing Day, when Bob dragged me into his office after we lost 3-1 at home to Manchester City and asked how I thought I'd done. I said, "Maybe I could play better and stop walking on my hands, swinging on the crossbar and chatting to the fans behind the goal." He said,"Yes, if you don't, you'll find yourself back at Crewe!" The only time I walked on my hands after that was when we scored a goal.

How did it feel to win your first title for Liverpool in 1982?

Jonny Yeardley, Huyton

We'd been 12th in the table on Boxing Day, but then we went on a run, only lost two matches and won the league. During the latter part of the campaign, we won the League Cup against Spurs at Wembley, against Ray Clemence. After the final, he came up to me and said, "Listen, be yourself and you'll be fine, don't try to be me." Those were great words from someone I looked up to. That stayed with me – he was such a nice man. Winning the League Cup gave us the impetus to win the league, although we didn't receive our medals until the first day of pre-season. Ronnie Moran walked in with a cardboard box, put it down on a massage table in the dressing room and said, "Take one if you think you deserved it last season." If you'd played in a certain number of games, you took a medal – that's how it worked. It was to keep us grounded.

"CARRAGHER SAID TO JERZY, 'DO A BRUCIE' BEFORE THE SHOOTOUT IN ISTANBUL – DUDEK SAID, 'BRUCIE WHO?'"

Was your famous jelly legs routine during the 1984 European Cup final penalty shootout premeditated or something you just did at the time?

Barry O'Loughlin, via Facebook

It was something that the gaffer, Joe Fagan, said to me before the shootout started. He put his arm around me and said, "Don't worry about anything, we shouldn't be in this position, we should have taken our opportunities, nobody is going to blame you if you can't stop a ball from 12 yards." Then he said, "Try to put them off."

The first Roma player I looked at was Bruno Conti, who came forward singing to himself, "I'm Bruno Conti, I crossed the ball in for Roberto Pruzzo to score, now I'm going to score a penalty." So I went onto the line, put my hands on my knees and did a '60s dance. He glanced up, placed the ball, took two paces and I did it again. Then he blasted the ball over the bar. That's when I thought it might work, so I did it to Francesco Graziani, because he put his arm around the referee and started chatting to him as he walked up to the penalty spot. I did the spaghetti legs, which he noticed, and when he crossed himself, I did it a second time. I knew where he was going, but he changed his mind and put it over the bar. That's when I went running around the field like an idiot. I was due to take the fifth penalty! Alan Kennedy took it instead.

How do you feel about your penalty antics being the inspiration to other goalkeepers like Jerzy Dudek?

Ben Gillie, via Facebook

Supposedly he did it [against Milan in 2005] because Jamie Carragher went up to him and said, "Jerzy, do a Brucie." Apparently he said, "Who's Brucie?!" and Jamie had to tell him! I give Jerzy all the credit, though – it was nothing to do with me. I never saved a penalty in 1984, whereas Jerzy saved a couple. If I was a little bit of inspiration for him to try that, then I'm happy, but it was all his doing. Years later, I chatted to him about it in the Legends Lounge at Anfield and said, "Wow, well done." He said, "I just thought about it in the spur of the moment." I said, "Snap, so did I!"

What was it like being in Liverpool's side that night at Heysel for the 1985 European Cup final?

Leon Simpson, Oxford

It had been a glorious sunny afternoon. As we travelled through Brussels, we saw some Liverpool supporters playing football against Juventus fans, having drinks together. When we drove up to the stadium, we noticed chicken wire around the perimeter, and pens made from more chicken wire. We didn't feel that was right, and the Juventus side of the stadium was awful. I remember going in after the warm-up and hearing a loud crack and fall, because we were in the dressing room near to the stand that collapsed. We went outside, and people came to us asking for buckets of water and towels. Myself and Alan Kennedy went back and forth from the dressing room, then Joe Fagan told us to stay inside. In the end, UEFA asked us to play the final – we didn't want to, but we did it. It was such a sad day. We don't forget the 39 that have gone.

How confident were 'Culture Club' Liverpool going into the 1988 FA Cup final with Wimbledon's 'Crazy Gang'?

Alex Swain, via Twitter

We were the dominant force – if we'd scored the penalty, we'd have gone on to win quite easily. John Aldridge took the ball from John Barnes and missed. It was one of football's biggest shocks, but that's what the game is about. You had to let Wimbledon have their glory.









You were closest to those poor fans at Hillsborough in 1989 – how did you deal with the trauma afterwards? I very much hope you've found peace with it now.
Matthew Theobald, via Twitter
It wasn't just a tragedy for Liverpool FC but for the whole of Liverpool, because people that died at Hillsborough were sons and daughters of Evertonians too. It hit the whole city. What happened had nothing to do with a bad mob of fans, it was down to the incompetence of the security and police. A few years previously, Tottenham went there and letters were sent to the FA saying that Hillsborough shouldn't be used because something tragic was going to happen. At the semi-final in 1988, the warning signs were there as well. I don't know why it's been so difficult for people to get answers. Things were just brushed under the carpet.

What did it mean to win the FA Cup so quickly after what had happened at Hillsborough?
Laura Rose, Lancaster
It was fitting we played Everton – that match was for the city. If the FA had any type of respect, they maybe could have let each club have the trophy for six months, which in my opinion would have been the most humane thing to do. But we had to play it.

How did it feel when Michael Thomas snatched the league title away from you in the last seconds of 1988–89?
Jamie Stein, via Instagram
I can remember the game as if it was yesterday. Kenny Dalglish did one of his oddest pre-match team-talks. We thought he'd say something like, 'We're sat here as champions – go and show them what we are'. Instead, he said, "Take it easy, they have to score twice so just hold them off." It was bizarre. Then they scored through Alan Smith, which we thought was handball. When Thomas ran through I was backing off, knowing there was only one place he could put his shot, which was on my left-hand side. Somehow he clipped it over me and into the net. How did we feel? Incredibly downhearted. There were two cases of champagne in the dressing room. I pulled out a bottle and it said '1989 First Division champions, Liverpool Football Club'. I pointed it out to Kenny, and he said I'd have to give it to Arsenal and apologise for the label. I agreed but said I'd get a mate of my first wife's husband to do it – he was an Arsenal supporter and a detective sergeant with Surrey Police. I went to the players lounge, grabbed Sergeant Cook and told him to carry a crate. He knocked on the door, George Graham came out and I said, "These bottles are for you, but I have a stipulation – this is a sergeant of the Surrey Police and he's an Arsenal fan. He'll get the other crate if he can have a drink with you and the players." He said, "Come in." They shut the door, and I didn't see the fella for two hours. Eventually he came out and his hair was soaking wet. I asked what had happened and he replied, "I could only have a glass of champagne if I got in the bath with them!"

How shocked were you when Kenny Dalglish quit as manager in 1991?
Andrew Shaw, Runcorn
We drew 4-4 at Everton in the FA Cup on a Wednesday, then on the Thursday we were travelling down to Luton. We didn't know anything until we went to Anfield that day to catch the bus. We sat in the dressing room and he said, "I'm not going to be your manager any more – I'm resigning. It's got nothing to do with you guys, it's because of someone else in the club." He walked out, then Alan Hansen came in about three minutes later, said the club were going to appoint an interim manager and the manager was going to be him. He looked at me and said, "Hey Bruce, if I'm going to be the player-manager, are you going to stay on your line? You need to stop running around on the field." He went round the whole team, criticising every part of it. He left, then two or three minutes later, in walked the chairman Noel White and behind him was Alan. Noel said, "Listen, Kenny has resigned. We've tried to ask him to come back but he's adamant, so we've got to appoint an interim manager." Noel paused and everyone looked over at Alan Hansen. Then he said, "That interim manager is going to be Ronnie Moran", adding that Ronnie wasn't too pleased with what Alan had said! Not long after, Liverpool brought in Graeme Souness from Rangers.

Clockwise from above
"I'm your goalie, the number one"; 'a tragedy for the city of Liverpool'; awful keeper, scared of crosses etc; Wembley's first wally with a brolly; World Cup woe in 1993; an FA Cup winner in '89; a season after the Reds' shock Wimbledon loss

HIGHS & LOWS

HIGH: 1984
Befuddles Roma with wobbly legs to win European Cup

LOW: 1985
Witnesses Heysel tragedy ahead of final defeat to Juventus

HIGH: 1988
Helps Liverpool win the league with a then record 90 points

LOW: 1989
Loses title to Arsenal a month after Hillsborough disaster

HIGH: 1992
Wins 13th major trophy with Liverpool, lifting the FA Cup



You rowed with Steve McManaman in a Merseyside derby once. If the two of you had a real tussle, who'd win?
Navdeep, via Twitter
I wasn't after McManaman, I was after the person that turned his back on the shot that went in the net. He was in the wrong place at the right time. As I was going after the fella I thought, 'Don't do it, because the newspapers will portray you as the bad guy'. I yelled to him, "If I say kick the ball away, don't keep it in play, kick it into the stands!" It was just handbags. It was the year that referees were told that if players start fighting, you can book them or send them both off. The ref was coming over to us with his little book out, but I told him we'd sorted it out and he put his book away. We were a bit lucky to get away with it.

You played with Graeme Souness at Liverpool. Why do you think it didn't quite work out for him as manager?
Lewis Mason, Skelmersdale
Graeme was a great chap off the park. On the park he was dynamic. As a boss,





final round of qualifying, lost, but were ordered to replay it [after fans attacked Zimbabwe players, hitting Grobbelaar with a lump of concrete]. We drew 0-0 in Lyon to advance, then lost 3-1 to Cameroon, so they went to the World Cup instead. In the next campaign we played Cameroon again, and they got through again. It's always Cameroon in Zimbabwe's way.

In 2018, you came out of retirement at 60 to play for Matabeleland at the CONIFA World Cup. Did you enjoy it?
Elliot Wilkinson, Slough
I was asked if I'd be their goalkeeping coach to help them out. I did it because the lads came from all over Zimbabwe, and half of them didn't have boots – I asked New Balance to send me some boots that they could wear. Our keeper got injured, then the second keeper got injured and I was sitting on the bench. We had to play the Chagos Islands and didn't have a keeper, so I was asked if I would play. I asked one of the injured keepers if he could last 20 minutes, he said yes, then we drafted in another goalkeeper coach and asked if he could play 20 or 30 minutes. He said yes, so I eventually played about 40 minutes in the first half. We won and I became the oldest goalkeeper at a World Cup!

Where and how did the curse against Liverpool occur?
Liam, via Instagram
When you're from Africa and played for teams with witch doctors, you don't disbelieve anything they do. When one put a curse on Liverpool at my Anfield testimonial [saying Liverpool wouldn't win the league without Grobbelaar in goal], I thought it was a joke – I didn't think he was a real witch doctor, but he was. Over the years Liverpool never won the title, so I thought, 'I've got to do something to get rid of this curse'.

Did you really pee on each goalpost at Anfield to lift the curse preventing us from winning the league?
Andy Fisher, via Instagram
In Africa, if the pitch was cursed then you peed on the posts. So when I came back to live in England, I was asked to play a corporate game at Anfield. I told the story to Tage Herstad, the fan who invited me, and he said, "Bruce, you've got to do the business." I said, "Yeah, I'll try to play well." He said, "No, you've got to finally lift the curse!" So I peed in a bottle, poured it all down the posts and crossbar at both ends, and saved a penalty at the Anfield Road End. Then the Reds went on an undefeated run at Anfield and won the Premier League!

Bruce chatted to FFT via Freebets.com

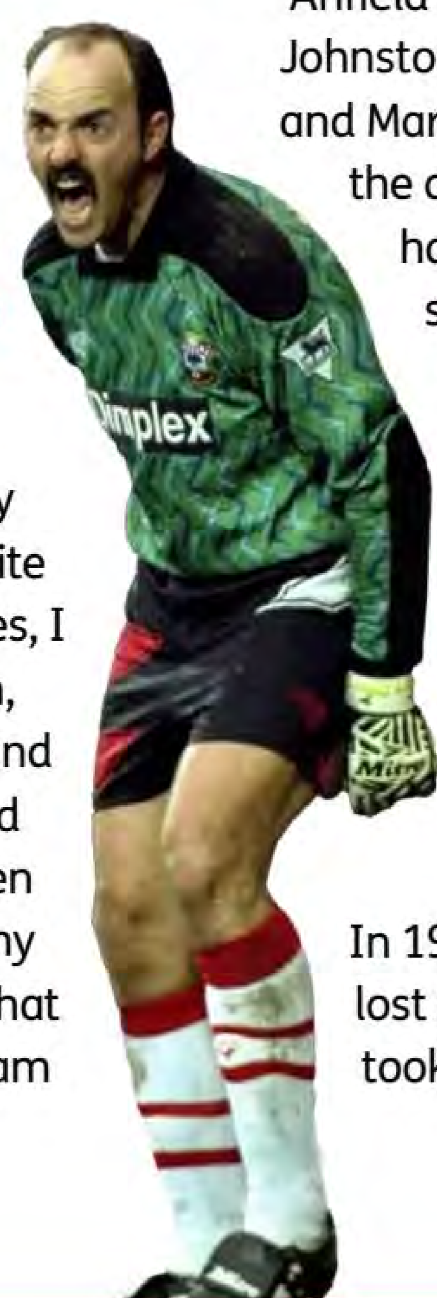
he tried to change too much too fast. He was the catalyst to get rid of the boot room, and he changed what we could and couldn't eat. He also got rid of great players and substituted them for mediocre players. The level of our consistency fell and we didn't hit the same heights as under past managers.

How hard was it to leave Liverpool after 628 appearances and six titles?
Jack Khan, Blackburn
Very hard. I went on loan to Stoke after having a disagreement with Graeme Souness. I'd gone back to Africa, then when I returned to England he loaned me out to Stoke.

How was your time at Southampton?
Lennie Wright, Farnham
Brilliant. I'd played alongside Alan Ball at Vancouver, so he asked me to go to Southampton with him and Lawrie McMenemy. The club were excellent with me at a difficult time in my life where I was accused of match-fixing. They looked after me very well there.

"ME AND LAWRO WERE THE ONLY ONES NOT TO SIGN THE 'ANFIELD RAP' CONTRACT – WE WANT OUR SHARE!"

You had a number of spells in the lower leagues. Which was the best?
Brian Thompson, Bridgnorth
After leaving Liverpool, I'd say Southampton was my favourite place. Going down the leagues, I had a great time at Plymouth, then I was always flitting in and out of teams. I went to Oxford and Sheffield Wednesday, then Oldham with Neil Warnock, my manager at Plymouth. After that I was at Bury, Lincoln, Chesham and Northwich Victoria. I always gave 100 per cent for the teams I played for – I enjoyed my stints with those clubs.



Which was your favourite: being part of the 'Anfield Rap', or appearing in an episode of *Brookside*?
Declan King, Widnes
Brookside was a cameo, whereas the 'Anfield Rap' was my room-mate Craig Johnston's brainchild. It was only me and Mark Lawrenson that didn't sign the contract – if we had done, we'd have got some money, but Craig scooped up all of the royalties. Now we're after him for our share! [*Laughs*]

What was your greatest day in a Zimbabwe shirt?
@the_twelvethman, via Twitter
I was one game away from qualifying for the World Cup. In 1980, we played Cameroon and lost 2-1 on aggregate. In 1993, we took on Egypt to progress to the



GREATEST REDS OF ALL TIME

Images Getty Images





Well, we did it. We sifted through all the Anfield icons and selected the top 50 (in our humble opinion). Let the arguments begin...

Words FourFourTwo Staff



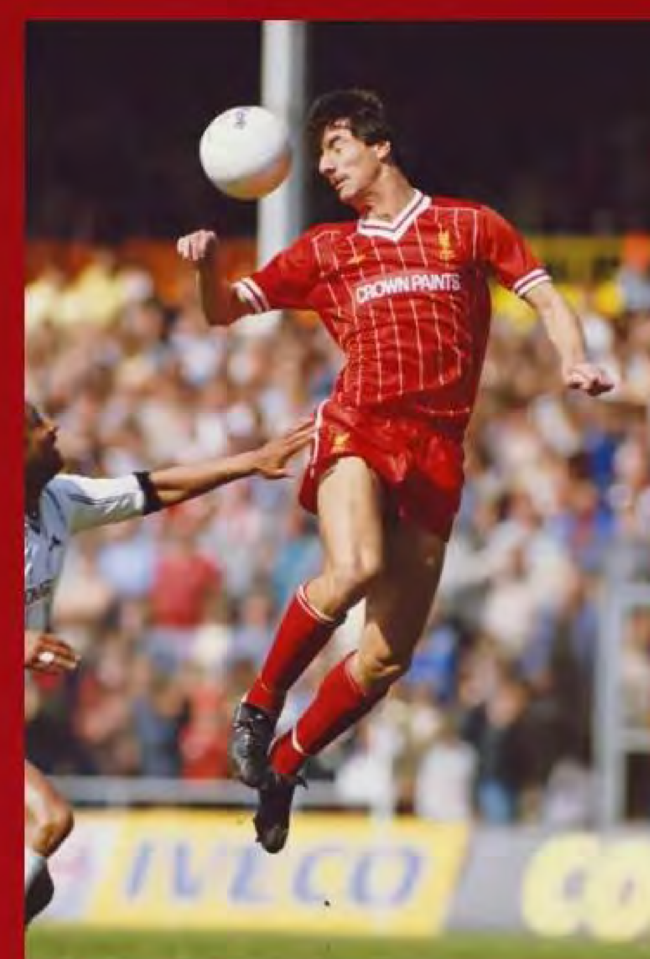




A wealth of supremely talented players have pulled on the famous Liverpool jersey throughout the club's 132-year history, many of whom helped the Reds to seize the game's biggest prizes and became fan favourites on Merseyside. It therefore goes without saying that narrowing down the greatest 50 players ever to feature for this storied institution was harder than a two-footed tackle by Neil Ruddock. But like the 'Razor', we don't shy away from a challenge, and at the risk of offending the Yossi Benayoun Appreciation Society, or worse, Jamie Redknapp, we've taken the plunge and picked a half-century that we think most Kopites will agree with. Be they a defender hewn from granite, a majestic midfield conductor or a dead-eyed striker, every one of the players on this list is a certified icon. Oh, and there are a few keepers in here too of course. Actually, now we mention it, what number's Loris Karius?







Images Getty Images



50 STEVE NICOL
1981–1994



A stalwart of Liverpool's glory years of the 1980s, the Scottish defender won five league titles, three FA Cups and the 1984 European Cup during almost 14 years at Anfield. Nicol was ahead of his time in providing a goal threat from right-back, scoring 36 for the Reds in total, including a hat-trick against Newcastle in 1987.

49 XABI ALONSO
2004–2009



The Spanish playmaker was a key figure in the Miracle of Istanbul, scoring Liverpool's equaliser to complete their Champions League final comeback against AC Milan. The silky midfielder went on to win the FA Cup the following season and also scored some of the most memorable goals in Liverpool's history thanks to his outstanding ability from long range. Currently working wonders at Bayer Leverkusen (who are on the cusp of winning their first-ever Bundesliga title), many thought Alonso would replace Klopp, but he is set to stay in Germany for at least another season.





48 STEVE MCMANAMAN
1990–1999

A boyhood Everton fan, McManaman more than made up for his early allegiances with his performances on the pitch for Liverpool after coming through the youth ranks at Anfield. The winger broke into the first team as a teenager in 1991–92, winning the FA Cup that season, and never looked back as he started to produce buckets of assists and a steady goal return. A League Cup title followed in 1994–95, and McManaman had long established a reputation as one of England's finest midfielders by the time he left for Real Madrid in 1999.



47 JAMES MILNER
2015–2023



He may not be the flashiest player in the world, but Milner's importance to Liverpool's revolution under Jürgen Klopp can't be denied. His versatility, leadership and consistency marked him out, but the industrious midfielder also became the first player in Champions League history to provide nine assists in one season in 2018–19. A Premier League, Champions League, FIFA Club World Cup, FA and League Cup winner who even spent a season at left-back, it's no wonder he's often name-checked as one of the most underrated players in England.

46 TOMMY LAWRENCE
1957–1971



Bill Shankly's first-choice goalkeeper, Lawrence was the rock behind two league titles and one FA Cup during the 1960s. He also boasted possibly one of the best nicknames in the club's history, as he was affectionately dubbed 'the Flying Pig' by fans due to an agility that belied his 14-stone frame.

45 ALBERT STUBBINS
1946–1953

One of Liverpool's finest players of the immediate post-World War II period, Stubbins' fame also earned him a place on the front cover of the Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper* album – where he was the only footballer to feature. After deciding on joining the Reds over Everton on the toss of a coin, the striker's decision paid off as he finished his debut season as the league's joint-top scorer, firing in 24 goals to win the Anfield club their first league title in 24 years.



44 JOHN ALDRIDGE
1987–1989

Signed to fill the boots of Ian Rush, Aldridge stood up to that daunting task and is considered one of Liverpool's best-ever goalscorers. The boyhood Reds fan scored 26 goals in his first full season as Kenny Dalglish's side won the 1987–88 title, forming one of the greatest attacking tridents in Liverpool history with John Barnes and Peter Beardsley. One sour note was a missed penalty in a shock FA Cup final defeat to Wimbledon that year, but he made up for it the following season by scoring in the cup final victory over rivals Everton.

43 FERNANDO TORRES
2007–2011



'El Nino' enjoyed the most prolific spell of his career while at Anfield after settling immediately following his 2007 then club-record move from Atlético Madrid. The first Liverpool player since Robbie Fowler 11 years earlier to hit 30 goals in a season for the club, he became the fastest player in Reds history to reach 50 league goals (Salah equalled this record with 50 goals in 72 league games), netting an incredible 33 times in all competitions in his debut season. Sadly, Torres' legacy on Merseyside was marred somewhat when he requested a transfer to Chelsea in January 2011.



"BYRNE BROKE HIS COLLARBONE DURING THE FA CUP FINAL BUT BATTLED ON"



42 STEVE MCMAHON
1985–1991

McMahon was Kenny Dalglish's first Liverpool signing and went on to become the midfield anchor behind three league titles and two FA Cups in the 1980s. A strong passer and tackler with an eye for the occasional goal – most memorably a 30-yard screamer against Manchester United – he earned high praise from Reds royalty in the form of Bob Paisley. "When Steve McMahon plays well, I always think that Liverpool will play well," said the managerial great.



41 GERRY BYRNE
1957–1969

The hard-as-nails defender was a one-club man and a favourite of Bill Shankly, who first thrust him into the starting side, where he stayed for much of the 1960s and won two league titles. Byrne famously broke his collarbone during the FA Cup final in 1965 after just three minutes but, with substitutions yet to be introduced, he battled on until the bitter end as the Reds lifted the famous trophy for the first time ever by beating Leeds United.



40 JIMMY CASE
1973–1981

A combative midfielder with a fierce shot, Case was a fan favourite who played a key role in a glorious era for Liverpool. A four-time league winner and three-time European champion who also boasted winner's medals in the UEFA Cup and League Cup, Case is also fondly remembered for his powerful goals, particularly a superb strike against loathed rivals Manchester United in the 1977 FA Cup final.

Images Getty Images

39 MICHAEL OWEN
1996–2004



Few players have ever taken to senior football as quickly and devastatingly as Owen, who scored on his debut aged 17 and never looked back, eventually departing for Real Madrid in 2004 after eight years at Anfield with a ratio of a goal every two games. Owen memorably scored twice in the final seven minutes of the FA Cup final in 2001 to turn the game on its head and clinch the trophy in a year that saw his 24-goal haul deliver an FA Cup, League Cup and UEFA Cup treble for the Merseyside club. That form earned Owen the Ballon d'Or, making him the first Liverpool player to win European football's biggest individual prize and the first English recipient since Kevin Keegan in 1979. No Englishman has won it since.







38 SAMMY LEE
1976–1986

A Liverpool lad, Lee rose through the ranks at his hometown club to become a key player in a golden age for the Reds. The diminutive but strong midfielder – who earned 14 England caps – won four league titles in five years between 1981 and 1986 as well as twice lifting the European Cup.

37 JOHN TOSHACK
1970–1978



Bill Shankly brought Toshack to Anfield from Cardiff City for a then club-record £111,000 fee, and the striker soon struck up a partnership with Kevin Keegan that helped him win two league titles, the European Cup, the FA Cup and two UEFA Cups. Keegan later explained that he "always knew Tosh was going to win the high balls... from then on it was just a question of me reading which way the ball was going to go". That understanding was perhaps most evident in the 1972-73 UEFA Cup final first leg, when two Toshack headers set up a Keegan brace in 3-0 win.

36 ROBERTO FIRMINO
2015–2023

The Brazilian was perhaps the least heralded member of a sensational Liverpool front three along with Mohamed Salah and Sadio Mané that fired the club to Champions League and Premier League glory in successive years under Klopp. But that doesn't reduce his importance to the side, as Firmino played a critical role in those successes with his goals, assists, work rate and energy. Klopp rightly described the striker as the "engine" of his team, and prior to his departure in the summer of 2023 Firmino once again proved vital as Liverpool won both the FA and League cups.





35 JAN MOLBY
1984–1996

Molby is described on Liverpool's website as being "widely regarded as the finest passer of a football to ever pull on the red shirt". That is high praise indeed, but no surprise for a man whose vision and creativity was behind three league titles for the club in the 1980s, as well as two FA Cup triumphs. The Dane was also prolific from the penalty spot, scoring 42 spot kicks for the club and missing just three, and he even netted a hat-trick of penalties against Coventry in 1986.



34 JORDAN HENDERSON
2011–2023

Henderson captained Liverpool to domestic, European and global glory during a trophy-laden spell at Anfield, marshalling a star-studded team from the centre of midfield with determination and style. The England international arrived from Sunderland in 2011 and succeeded club legend Steven Gerrard as skipper four years later. He proved more than equal to the task, making 492 appearances before his controversial move to Steven Gerrard's Al-Ettifaq in July 2023.

33 BRUCE GROBBELAAR
1981–1994

The moustachioed goalkeeper is perhaps best known for the wobbly leg routine that helped Liverpool beat Roma on penalties in the Italian capital to clinch the 1984 European Cup, but the Zimbabwean was a constant presence between the sticks throughout the 1980s at Anfield. Over 14 years at the club, Grobbelaar won six league titles, three FA Cups, three League Cups and of course that European crown, racking up a whopping 628 appearances.



32 TRENT ALEXANDER-ARNOLD
2016–

It says a lot about Alexander-Arnold that he's already considered among the best players to have ever played for Liverpool at the age of 25. But he's achieved a lot already, playing a huge role in the Reds' Premier League, Champions League and Club World Cup wins under Jürgen Klopp with buckets of assists and goals from right-back. He currently holds the record number of assists for a defender in a single Premier League season with 13 (at the time of writing he boasts a total of 58 league assists), and his appearance in the triumphant Champions League final against Tottenham in 2019 made him the youngest player, aged 22, to feature in back-to-back finals in the tournament.



30 RAY KENNEDY
1974–1982

Bob Paisley moved Kennedy out of the forward line to the left side of midfield midway through the 1975–76 season, an inspired decision that transformed the former Arsenal striker's time at the club. He immediately excelled in the new role, quickly nailing down a regular starting spot as Liverpool began a run of five league title wins in seven years. Kennedy also won three European Cups during an incredible period of success for the Reds, and his goal against Bayern Munich in the semi-finals of the 1981 edition proved to be decisive over two legs.



31 RONNIE WHELAN
1979–1994

→ A stalwart of Liverpool's hugely successful period in the 1980s, Whelan arrived at Anfield from his native Ireland in 1979 and had established himself as a regular within two years. The midfielder remained a key member of the side until the 1990s, picking up six league winner's medals, three FA Cups, three League Cups and the 1984 European Cup.



29 ANDREW ROBERTSON
2017–

Robertson's rise from playing part-time football with Queen's Park in Scotland's fourth tier to signing for Liverpool in the space of four years is well documented, but that doesn't make it any less spectacular. The Scotland captain has excelled under Jürgen Klopp, providing a dynamism and attacking threat from left-back that few players in his position are capable of. The 30-year-old has been a key cog in the Reds machine that has won ever major honour available, and it's surely only a matter of time before more silverware follows.

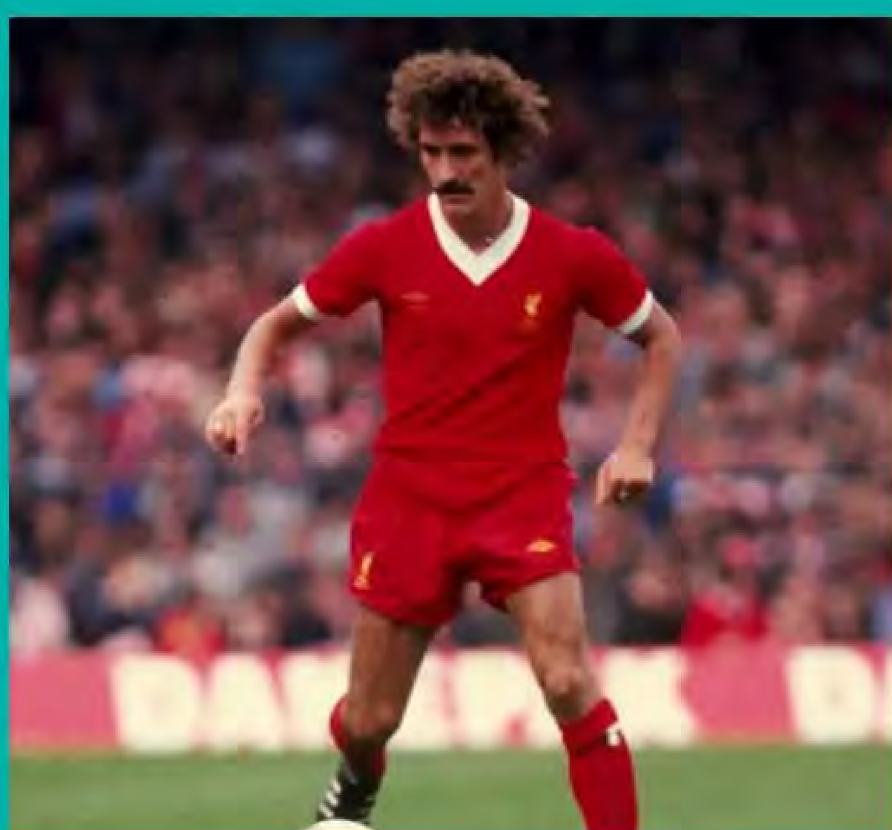




28 MARK LAWRENSON
1981–1988

Lawrenson cost Liverpool a then club-record fee of £900,000 when he signed from Brighton in 1981, but the defender proved to be worth every penny as he formed a formidable partnership with Alan Hansen. Lawrenson was fast, strong and able to play in a variety of roles, but it was in the centre alongside Hansen that he excelled, winning five league titles, the FA Cup and the European Cup in seven seasons at Anfield.

Images Getty Images



27 TERRY MCDERMOTT
1974–1982

McDermott's creative and attacking abilities perfectly complemented his tough-tackling midfield partner Graeme Souness, and the England international scored some spectacular strikes during a trophy-littered eight-year spell at Anfield. A three-time European and five-time English champion, McDermott was the first player ever to win the Football Writers' and PFA Player of the Year awards in the same season in 1980, while his diving header in a 7-0 thumping of Tottenham in 1978 is considered one of the greatest Anfield goals ever.



26 RAY CLEMENCE
1967–1981

Clemence's performances between the sticks were a major feature of a golden era of success at Anfield. The agile and ever-reliable keeper cost the Reds just £18,000 from Scunthorpe in 1967, one of the greatest bargains they ever struck. Once he took the first-team gloves from Tommy Lawrence, Clemence helped Liverpool build a ferocious defensive unit that was behind three European Cups, two UEFA Cups and five league titles, with the goalkeeper providing incredible consistency by missing just six league games in 11 years.



25 ALAN KENNEDY
1978–1986



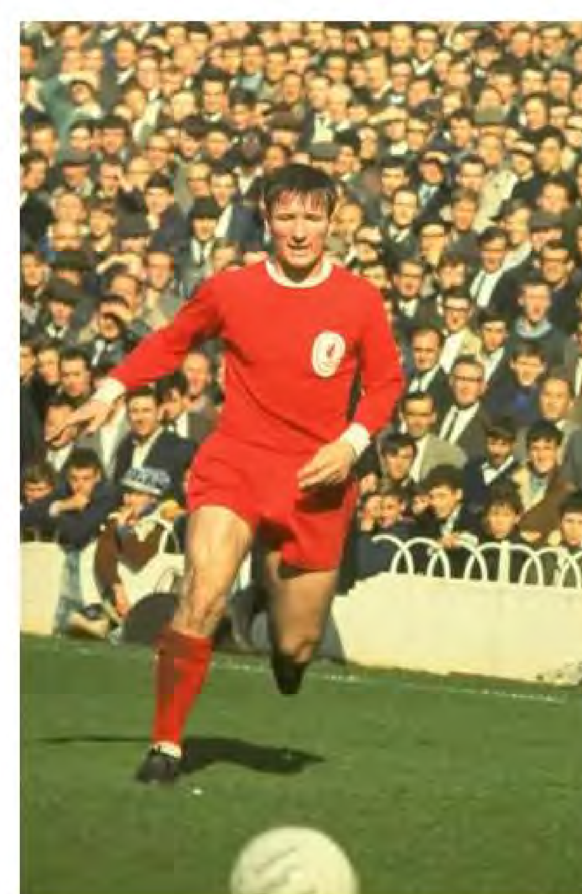
Before Andy Robertson there was Alan Kennedy. A marauding left-back who scored a series of crucial goals in Liverpool's glittering run throughout the 1980s, Kennedy joined the Reds from Newcastle in 1978, becoming the most expensive full-back in England at £330,000. Brought in to fill a void in Bob Paisley's squad, expectations were high, but it's fair to say Kennedy exceeded them. He scored the only goal in the 1981 European Cup final win over Real Madrid and the decisive spot-kick in the triumph over Roma three years later. In total, he won 11 major trophies with Liverpool, including five First Division titles, laying the blueprint for those attacking full-backs to follow.

24 ALISSON
2018–



When Liverpool sanctioned an – at the time – world-record transfer fee for a goalkeeper to bring Alisson from Rome to Merseyside in 2018, they knew what they were doing. Head of goalkeeping John Achterberg had tracked the Brazilian for five years since his days at Internacional and was convinced he could solve a long-term problem position. After years of effectively making do between the sticks, Alisson was a fully formed fix; commanding, agile, strong, blessed with lightning reflexes and the ability to kickstart counterattacks with his pinpoint delivery. Six major honours to date makes the £65 million paid to Roma an absolute steal – particularly when compared to the keeper who broke his transfer record just three weeks after Alisson's move: Kepa Arrizabalaga.

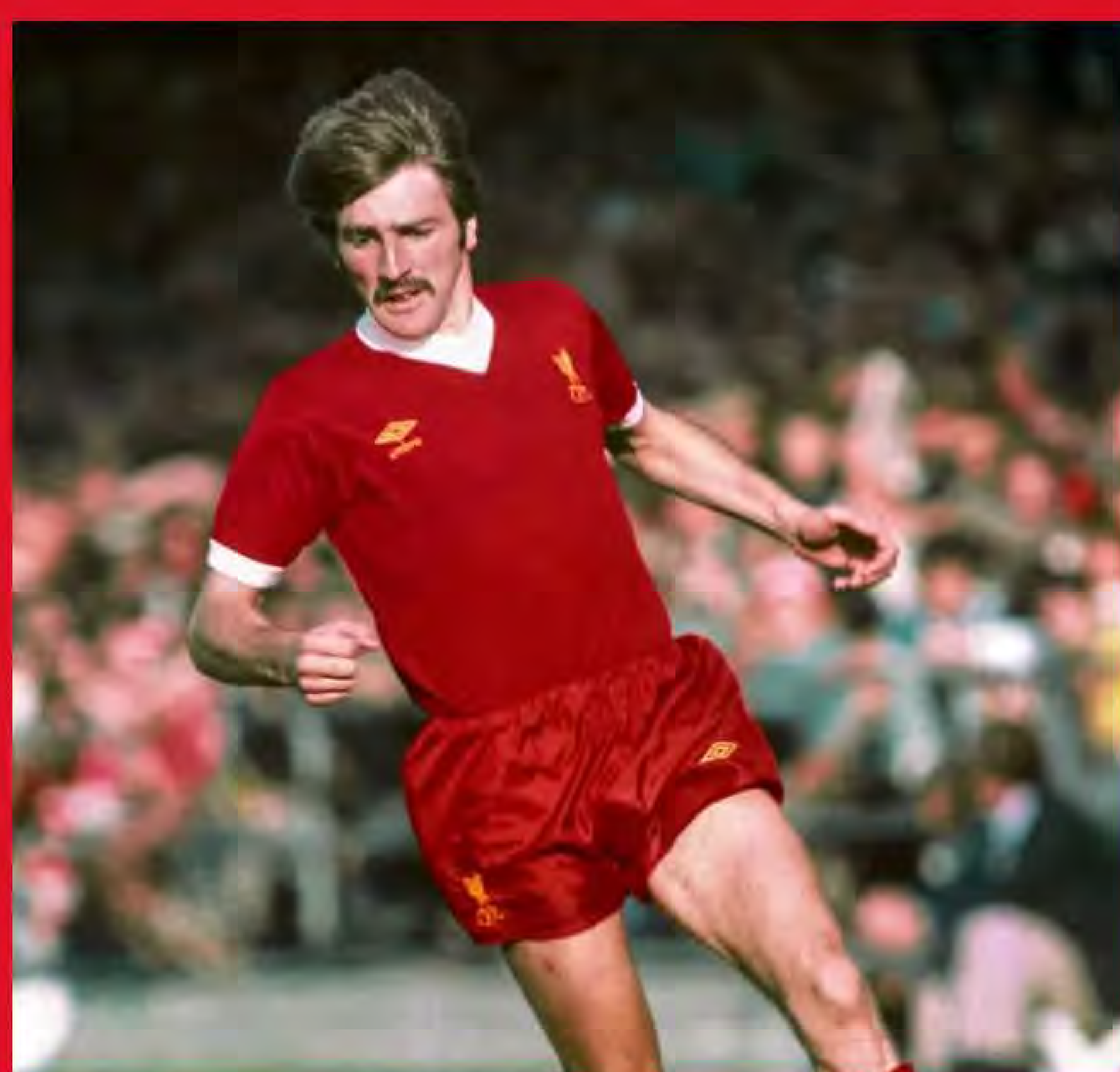
23 TOMMY SMITH
1962–1978



Tommy Smith was made for Liverpool. Born and raised around Anfield, as a youngster he joined the ground staff at the stadium before progressing through the schoolboy ranks as he impressed Bill Shankly. The young Smith began as a striker but established himself as a formidable presence at centre-back over a decorated 16-year spell with the first team that saw him transcend the evolution of the early 1960s to the late 1970s. He was an unforgiving, fearless player who was a regular in the side for over a decade, including one season in 1970–71 that saw him make 61 appearances. Overall, Smith played 638 times for his boyhood club, landing him eighth in the club's all-time list. As Bill Shankly aptly put it: "Tommy Smith wasn't born, he was quarried."



Images Getty Images



22 SAMI HYYPIÄ
1999–2009



One of the all-time bargain signings in Liverpool's history, Hyypiä was recommended to chief executive Peter Robinson by the club's official European cameraman. After extensive scouting, the Finn was plucked from Willem II for just £2.5 million. He gave Gérard Houllier's side the steel and finesse they required alongside the dogged Jamie Carragher, leading to a trophy treble in 2000–01, while he produced a king-making display against Juventus en route to Champions League success in 2005. Hyypiä wore the captain's armband with distinction until it was graciously passed on to Steven Gerrard, and with 464 appearances over ten years, he is one of only two overseas players in the club's all-time top 25.

21 STEVE HEIGHWAY
1970–1981

A legendary winger whose name is still sung on the Kop today, Heighway was brought to Liverpool in his early 20s and made the transition from non-league to First Division seamlessly. Blessed with blistering pace and the strength to shake off the robust challenges that hallmarked his era, he could both score and assist with an impressive frequency – of those to ply their trade in years gone, he would arguably be one of the most suited to the modern game. Later in his career he used his brain and instinct to shift into a more central role, which helped prolong a remarkable career that kept him at Anfield into his mid-30s and saw him win 11 major trophies.

20 RON YEATS
1961–1971

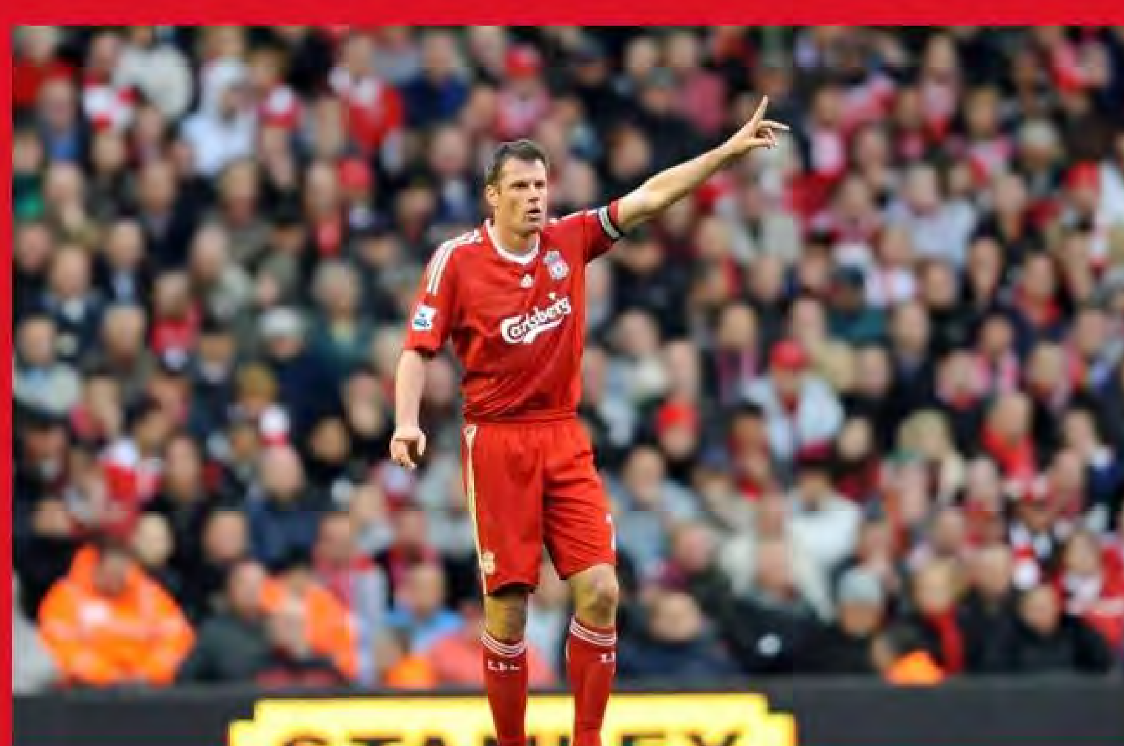


As Bill Shankly plotted a pathway back to the First Division, he earmarked his fellow Scot as the man to build around in defence, inviting journalists upon Yeats' unveiling to "take a walk around my centre-half, gentlemen, he's a colossus!" When Yeats lined up alongside his new team-mates at Anfield he resembled a giant, and as Shankly promised upon his arrival, he was in the top flight a year later. A constant throughout the '60s, Yeats was his generation's Virgil van Dijk; an immovable object who could dominate games with his sheer presence. He would later serve as chief scout.



19 PHIL THOMPSON
1971–1984

A cultured defender who helped propel the role into a new era, Thompson was central to Liverpool's success throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. The Kirkby native, who spent his childhood on the Kop, went on to lift the title as Liverpool captain, partnering a host of top-tier centre-backs as a valued lieutenant for Bill Shankly and Bob Paisley. Thompson was also a staple for England, with his graceful approach in defence leading to a stylistic shift from long balls to playing out from the back. He went on to serve Liverpool in various backroom roles in the decades after his retirement, including stepping into the dugout when Gérard Houllier required emergency heart surgery in 2001.



18 JAMIE CARRAGHER
1996–2013

A boyhood Everton fan, Carragher has embodied Liverpool ever since his goalscoring debut as a precocious full-back. He made a natural progression from the defensive flanks to his long-term role at centre-back, leading by example as a no-nonsense, never-say-die figure. He is second on Liverpool's all-time appearances list with 737 games, and though he won the treble under Houllier and fought through cramp to help drag Liverpool to Champions League success in Istanbul, his commitment deserved more trophies. Though never the most refined player, he was a world-class centre-back who gave everything for the club he now calls his own.



17 ROBBIE FOWLER
1993–2001, 2006–2007

One of the best finishers to ever represent Liverpool, Robbie Fowler could score from anywhere; with his left foot, his right foot or his head, honing his natural poacher's instinct to become a fearsome No. 9. Fowler was certainly more than the sum of his goals, but they are what have defined his career. He was ruthless in the box, scoring 183 times for Liverpool, and that he came through the academy made him an even more popular figure among fans.

Images Getty Images



16 SADIO MANÉ
2016–2022

Incredibly, given what he went on to achieve, Sadio Mané's transfer to Liverpool from Southampton was not universally popular. The Senegalese quickly proved his doubters wrong, becoming a central figure in the club's success under Jürgen Klopp: a tenacious, phenomenally gifted forward who excelled in a variety of positions with an unshakable will to win. His unassuming character ensures that he remains underrated by many, but Mané was undoubtedly one of the best players to represent Liverpool and a key cog in the club's revival.

15 EMLYN HUGHES
1967–1979



Emlyn Hughes was a prototypical top-flight footballer, one whose dedication and enthusiasm matched his unparalleled talent at the time. Bill Shankly was so convinced he could build his side around the Blackpool defender that he called him every day until his eventual move to Anfield in 1967. Hughes, who became affectionately known as 'Crazy Horse', gave everything for Liverpool and led the club as captain throughout a dominant spell.



14 IAN ST JOHN
1961–1971

Along with Ron Yeats, the relentless Ian St John was heralded by Bill Shankly as "the beginning of Liverpool," with the legendary manager considering the pair as his greatest signings. That is quite the testimony, and St John earned it as a transformational presence up front for Liverpool. His goals – 118 in 425 games – helped lead the Reds to glory throughout the 1960s, including their first-ever FA Cup with an extra-time header to beat Leeds in front of 100,000 fans at Wembley in 1965.



13 ALAN HANSEN
1977–1991

Alan Hansen may be better known to fans of a certain vintage as the surly Scot who once graced the Match of the Day sofa, but he is remembered on Merseyside as a trailblazing centre-back who helped elevate his team. He was the fulcrum of Liverpool's defence for over a decade, with his ability to bring the ball out from the back with staggering ease giving the Reds another edge. His effortless style is a touchstone for the modern defender, able to preside over great lengths of the pitch with strength, composure and cool.



12 IAN CALLAGHAN
1959–1978

"IF THERE WERE 11 CALLAGHANS THERE WOULD NEVER BE ANY NEED TO PUT UP A TEAM SHEET"

With 857 appearances for Liverpool over 19 seasons, Ian Callaghan holds a Liverpool record that will almost certainly never be broken. The diminutive winger succeeded an icon in Billy Liddell and convinced Bill Shankly as the "model professional" before shifting into a new role to lend his industry in the middle of the park. "If there were 11 Callaghans at Anfield there would never be any need to put up a team sheet," Shankly once said. "You could stake your life on Ian."

11 BILLY LIDDELL
1938–1961

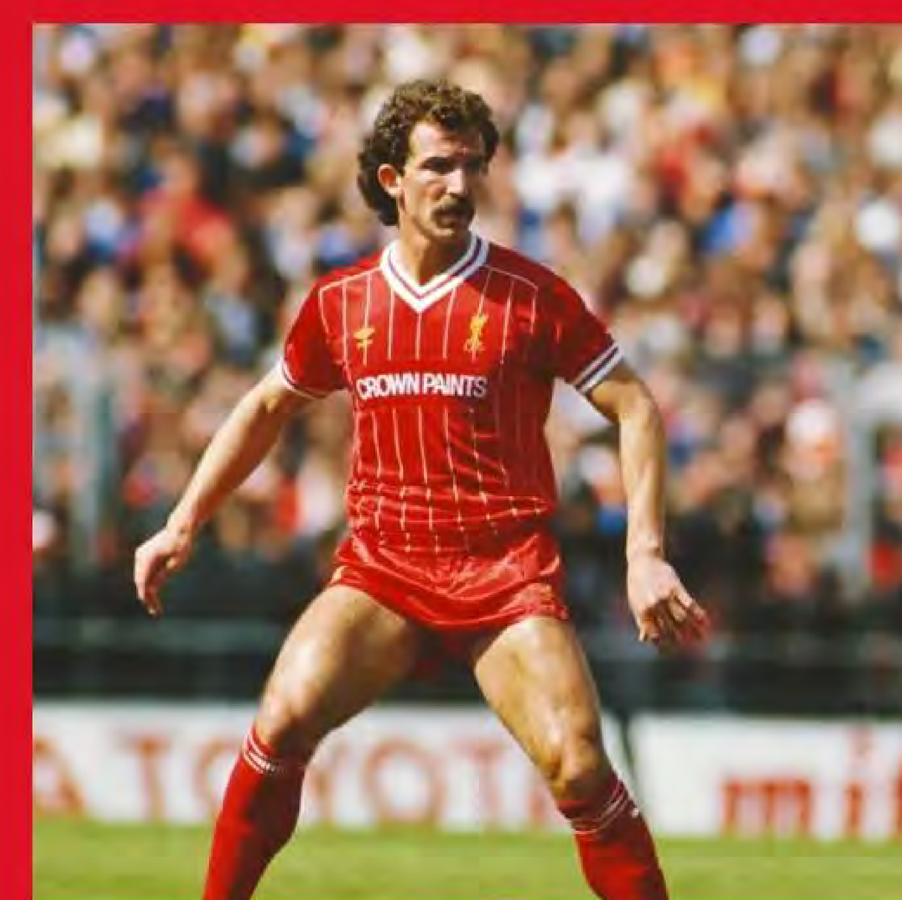
Billy Liddell was born in Scotland but spent his entire professional career with Liverpool, a span of 23 years only interrupted by service as an RAF navigator during World War II. Known as a bullishly strong forward, Liddell played most often on the left wing but was also capable of playing on the right and up front; a boundless source of goals who only improved as the decades went on. Liddell was one of the most popular players in football, and his imprint on Liverpool weighed so heavily that the club became affectionately known as 'Liddellpool'.





10 KEVIN KEEGAN
1971–1977

The original Anfield pinup? Kevin Keegan scored 12 minutes into his Liverpool debut as a 20-year-old striker for Bill Shankly and barely stopped over six outstanding seasons. His skill was dazzling and he always seemed at least a step ahead of the defenders in front of him, intertwining with the likes of John Toshack, Steve Heighway and Ray Kennedy as the exciting fulcrum of Shankly's attack. Keegan netted exactly 100 times during his spell with the Reds, becoming an icon in the No. 7 shirt before making the bold step to leave England for Hamburg, where he twice won the Ballon d'Or. No Englishman won that prize again until Michael Owen in 2001, with Keegan's mesmeric talents forged on Merseyside.



09 GRAEME SOUNESS
1978–1984

Far removed from the curmudgeon in the Sky Sports studio, as a player Graeme Souness was the complete midfielder and a talisman who helped lead Liverpool to glory. Brought in soon after Kenny Dalglish and Alan Hansen, Souness was part of the regeneration of Bob Paisley's European Cup-winning side, and he soon put his stamp on the Geordie's midfield. While he may be renowned for his all-action, aggressive approach, Souness was also an outstanding passer, a nimble dribbler and a fantastic striker of the ball who netted 55 times in 359 games. Souness dominated a Roma midfield comprised of Toninho Cerezo and Falcão in his final game for Liverpool, signing off in trademark fashion as he lifted a fourth European Cup.

Images Getty Images

08 ROGER HUNT
1958–1969

"To Liverpool supporters it is 'Sir Roger', as he was christened by the Kop all those years ago," Jamie Carragher said of the late Roger Hunt in 2021, "and one of the guys who made Liverpool what it is today." Part of the England squad to reach immortality at the 1966 World Cup, Hunt was a deadly finisher who remains second in Liverpool's all-time goalscorers list, with 285 goals in just 492 games. His club-record 244 goals in the league will likely never be surpassed, with the striker signed from Stockton Heath playing a crucial role in the club's rise from Second Division to top-flight glory. The Kop adored him, and rightly so. Hunt's achievements have gone down in history.

"HUNT WAS A DEADLY FINISHER WHO REMAINS SECOND IN LIVERPOOL'S GOALSCORERS LIST, WITH 285 GOALS IN 492 GAMES"



07 VIRGIL VAN DIJK
2018–

When considering Virgil van Dijk's impact on modern-day Liverpool, he is often held up against the likes of Ron Yeats and Alan Hansen in the debate over the club's best-ever centre-back. Make no mistake, Van Dijk is the best and most complete defender to ever play for the Reds. His £75-million transfer from Southampton is one of the most influential of Jürgen Klopp's reign, with the Dutchman having a transformative and almost immediate effect on the club's defensive fortunes. Now the club's skipper, Van Dijk can do it all, and often does so with a nonchalance that suggests there is even more in his locker than he gives away. A Rolls Royce if ever there was one.



06 IAN RUSH
1980–1987, 1988–1996

A ridiculously prolific striker, Ian Rush is the benchmark for Liverpool forwards, not only for his record tally of 346 goals in 660 games but also his ceaseless effort in defending from the front. The Welshman served the club throughout the 1980s and for much of the 1990s – albeit sandwiching a brief and ill-fated stint at Juventus – and set the tone with his quality in leading the line. Rush made finishing look easy, breaking the 30-goal mark five times in his first six full seasons with Liverpool, including twice scoring 40 or more. And though his powers certainly faded in the twilight of his career in the Premier League era, Rush was still a valuable player for the club he came to adore.



"RUSH BROKE THE 30-GOAL MARK FIVE TIMES IN SIX SEASONS"

05 JOHN BARNES

1987–1997

For a generation of football fans, John Barnes was their inspiration, a sublime winger who swapped Watford for Liverpool in 1987 and became an icon. On the ball, Barnes was truly untouchable, his dribbling ability unparalleled, and as one of the first high-profile Black players in the English top-flight he rose above the abuse that sadly rained from the stands. In his later years he presided over a deeper role in midfield, captaining the side through the mid-1990s as he utilised his football brain to dictate play.

> "ONE THE BALL, BARNES WAS TRULY UNTOUCHABLE, HIS DRIBBLING ABILITY UNPARALLELED"



04 LUIS SUÁREZ

2011–2014

For many supporters and teammates alike, Luis Suárez is the most talented footballer to ever play for Liverpool. The Uruguayan bowled up at Anfield alongside Andy Carroll at the end of a dramatic January transfer window in 2011, and from his very first training session he convinced the likes of Steven Gerrard and Jamie Carragher of his world-class ability. It was in his second full season with Liverpool that Suárez truly came alive, and in the following campaign in 2013–14 he almost steered Brendan Rodgers' side to the title with an incredible goal-scoring streak. A tenacious, unrelenting forward who always seemed to come out on top in 50-50s and one-on-ones, Suárez was a unique player who captured the hearts of the Kop. If only he had stayed longer.

Images Getty Images



03 MOHAMED SALAH

2017–

Mohamed Salah is a different breed of footballer; a truly elite sportsman who stands alongside the very best in terms of dedication to his craft. Having seen his hopes of joining Liverpool back in 2014 dashed, he endured a disastrous spell at Chelsea. The Egyptian harnessed that disappointment when he moved to Fiorentina and later Roma on loan, tearing through Serie A before arriving at Anfield in 2017. Salah has never scored fewer than 23 goals in a single season for the Reds, twice netting more than 30. In his incredible maiden campaign on Merseyside he scored 44 times in 52 games. He is a goal machine beloved by the fans and is third on the club's list of record goalscorers with a frankly ridiculous 208 goals in 338 games at the time of writing. With an average of a goal every 133 minutes, if he chooses to shun the overtures of the Saudi Arabian league and remain at Anfield there's no guessing how many more the three-time Premier League Golden Boot winner will score. But it isn't just goals that this fleet-footed pharaoh offers – at the time of writing he has 68 league assists.

02 STEVEN GERRARD

1998–2015

There is a good argument for Steven Gerrard being Liverpool's greatest ever player. Quite simply, if you took Gerrard out of the Liverpool side during his era, Liverpool would have been mid-table. The 2005 Champions League simply wouldn't have happened. Gerrard almost single-handedly dragged Liverpool through some tough times during the 2000s, acting like a real life Roy of the Rovers, scoring sensational 30-yard volleys in stoppage time, inspiring some mediocre players around him and keeping Liverpool competitive. He is still the only player to have scored in a League Cup final, FA Cup final, UEFA Cup final and Champions League final. He's in that rare club of having an FA Cup final named after him following the 2006 last-minute equaliser from 35 yards against West Ham. Had Gerrard been able to complete his trophy set with a league title there is a strong argument that he would be sitting at the top of the pile. He is the definition of a club legend.



"LIVERPOOL WOULD HAVE BEEN MID-TABLE WITHOUT GERRARD"

"HIS CHARACTER IN THE AFTERMATH OF HILLSBOROUGH WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN BY FAMILIES ON MERSEYSIDE"



01 KENNY DALGLISH

1977–1990

To a certain generation of Liverpool fan, 'King' Kenny Dalglish will always be their number one, and rightly so. Brought in to replace the outgoing King Kevin (Keegan), Dalglish ended his first season at Anfield by scoring the winning goal in the 1978 European Cup final – and the rest, as they say, is history. Six league titles in the next eight seasons followed, along with another two European Cups, as Dalglish led Liverpool to trophy domination in England and Europe. The latter of those titles was achieved as a 35-year-old player-manager, scoring the winner at Stamford Bridge and leading the Reds to a league and FA Cup double. Now a Sir, Dalglish did it all on the pitch and off it. His character in the aftermath of the Hillsborough disaster will never be forgotten by the families on Merseyside, with Dalglish and his wife, Marina, attending dozens of funerals, including four in one day. "When Kenny shines, the whole team is illuminated," Bob Paisley eloquently once put it. And boy, did King Kenny shine for Liverpool.

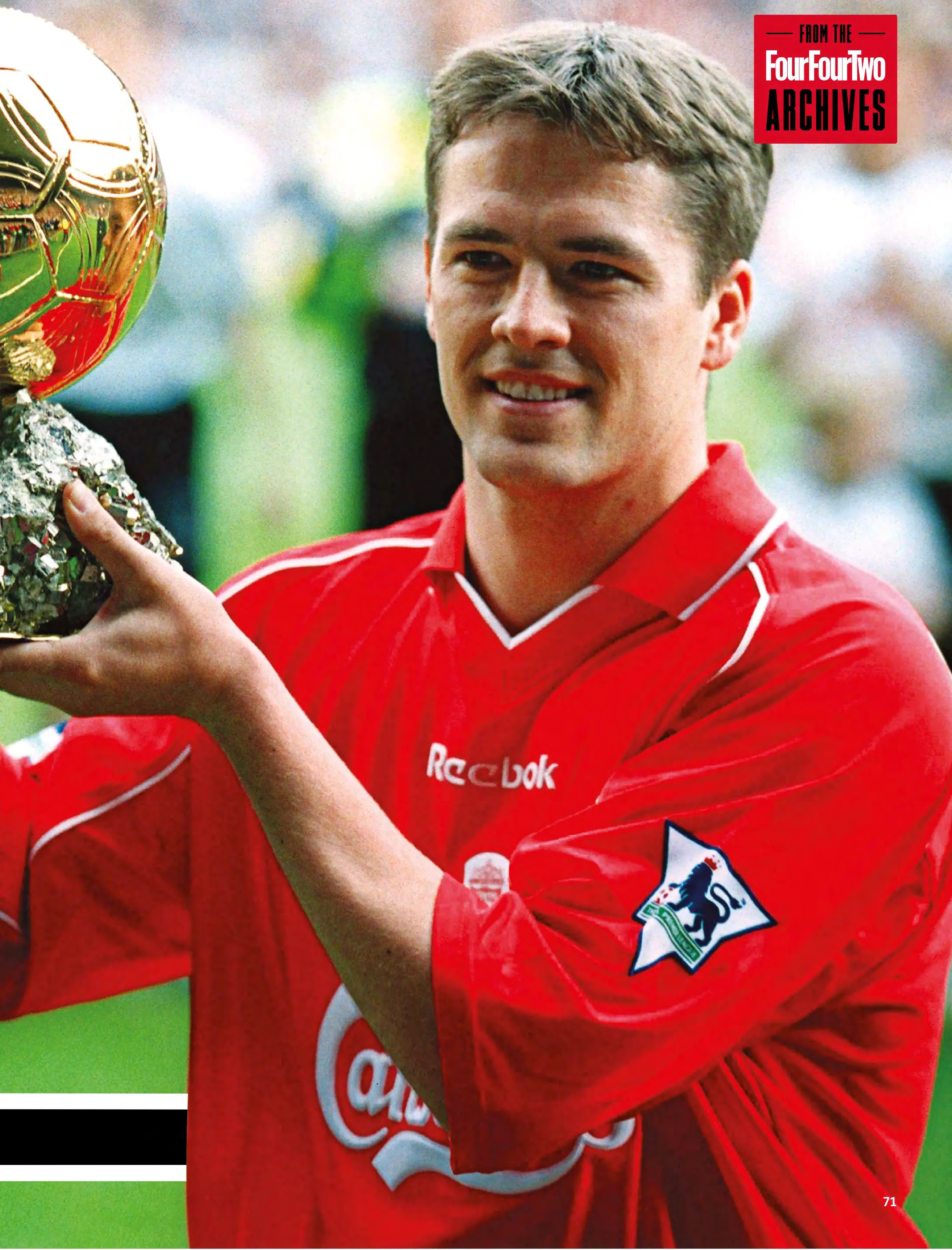
Images Getty Images

THE FORGOTTEN BALLON D'OR



Years before Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo raised the award's profile forever, Michael Owen was crowned Europe's best player in 2001. He and Jamie Carragher talk *FFT* through his annus mirabilis and ponder why he never got the credit he deserved

Words Matt Barker


Reebok



Michael Owen has never been one to shout. At his absolute fresh-faced turn-of-the-century peak, there was no swagger, no smug look-at-me celebration – just the sense of someone going about his job to the best of his considerable ability, banging in goals for club and country.

In 2001, Owen was irresistible. He picked up six trophies that year: the FA Cup, League Cup and UEFA Cup treble, plus the Charity Shield and UEFA Super Cup – and then, just three days after turning 22, the Ballon d'Or. He remains the last Englishman to win the award.

The gong came on the back of 31 goals for a Liverpool side desperate to reinstate itself as a force domestically and in Europe. The bigger the game, the better he played. A highly intelligent footballer with brilliant movement, he could time his runs to perfection. He was also – despite his youthful stature – an absolute fiend to get off the ball.

Owen was blessed with a ruthlessness as well; a single-mindedness worthy of Roy Keane. Today, as he sits down to talk with *FourFourTwo*, the former marksman shrugs when we ask him for his memories of that incredible year. Despite all of the silverware, he rarely stopped to think about what he was accomplishing.

"To me, if you sit back and think about what you've just achieved, it's a weakness," says Owen. "To be very good, and consistently very good, you need to be greedy, and it has to become an obsession. It's not so much about the enjoyment of winning something. It's more about the pain of watching someone else take what should be yours."

That 2000–01 Liverpool vintage has somehow slipped through the cracks, lost between the white-suited Spice Boys era of the mid-90s and the dramatic triumph of Istanbul. Owen's old room-mate, Jamie Carragher, reckons the treble-winners were a much better team than the one that saw off Milan in the 2005 Champions League final.

"It was definitely my favourite season," the 41-year-old ex-defender tells *FFT*. "If you win three cup competitions and also finish 3rd in the league, it means you won most of the games you played. And we did. That's probably the one team I look back at and think, 'I was playing with all my mates'. Michael was there, Robbie Fowler, Danny Murphy, Steven Gerrard, Didi Hamann, Jamie Redknapp – people I'm still close with now were in that team. Sharing those things together is special."

That particular Reds outfit wasn't the easiest on the eye. The path to victory was often built on frustrating the opposition and grinding out results. With Manchester United and Arsenal frequently operating on a completely different level to everyone else, Gérard Houllier's charges worked within their limitations, making the most of counterattacking opportunities and a dogged team spirit. "We were a tough side, with a fantastic back four," recalls Owen. "Sami Hyypiä, Stéphane Henchoz, Carragher – they were like Trojans in every single match they played. We had Hamann and Gerrard too, of course. We had guts, and no one played more games than we did that season. We played every game that was available to us, and that in itself is no mean achievement."

The first half of that mammoth 63-match campaign had been fairly humdrum, with little to suggest what was to come. Owen, unable to help England out of their Euro 2000 group, hit seven goals in his first six league appearances of the season, including a hat-trick against Aston Villa, but then scored only once in his next 13. A seven-month period from October to April brought him two league goals.

Liverpool weren't pulling up any trees, either, losing to Ipswich and Middlesbrough in December. Then, something began to spark around the turn of the year. A lot of that was down to Owen clicking into gear. "In that season, with Owen, Fowler, Emile Heskey and Jari Litmanen, we possibly had the best set of strikers in the world," says Carragher. "Michael didn't really have a great first half of the season, but as soon as he got his form back, it was scary."

Owen actually didn't feature in the first of Liverpool's trophy wins that season: he was an unused substitute as Houllier started Heskey and Fowler in the League Cup final at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium. They eventually beat second-tier Birmingham in a penalty shootout.

But while Fowler started in Cardiff, he found himself falling down the Anfield pecking order. Houllier clearly preferred the pairing of Heskey and Owen. The Frenchman had been steadily building his team since arriving on Merseyside in July 1998, initially as joint-manager with Roy Evans. Like his countryman Arsène Wenger, Houllier was something of a footballing Anglophile, keen to marry a Gallic eye for detail with classic English strengths of teamwork, resilience and belief.

"He really dragged the club into this new era of how you look after yourself and prepare," explains Owen. "We were looking at Arsenal and they were mind-blowing. We were thinking, 'These buggers don't get injured, they run faster than us, they run longer than us, they're never resting players – what the hell are they doing?'

"Houllier was the first to introduce those ideas at Anfield. He could never tell Gerrard how to pass a ball, or me how to finish, or Carragher how to defend, but what he was really good at was judging players. Tactically he was very astute. He was good at motivating and getting us working as a unit. He was a very good leader of people."

After lifting the League Cup, it was full steam ahead on all fronts, with the UEFA Cup proving a particularly potent platform. The club sensed that it was back on the European stage once again, free from the long shadows cast by events at Heysel and subsequent ban from Europe. "The UEFA Cup was massive back then," continues Owen. "We played Barcelona, Roma, Porto, Olympiakos – and that's before we got to the final. It was a really difficult competition to win."

Owen had scored twice against Fabio Capello's in-form Roma at the Stadio Olimpico in February. Liverpool's quarter-final tie against Porto began with a goalless draw in Portugal, but two quick first-half goals at Anfield from Murphy and Owen gave Liverpool a comfortable lead that they protected without much grief.

Barcelona awaited in the semis, live on the BBC. Incredibly, kick-off for the first leg at the Camp Nou was put back to 8.10 p.m. at the Beeb's request to avoid clashing with *EastEnders* and the revelation of who shot Phil Mitchell. Presumably all of Barcelona wanted to find out, too.

But there was little drama on offer in Catalonia as the Reds defended in numbers to thwart a Barça side featuring Rivaldo, Luis Enrique, Pep Guardiola and Frank de Boer. The return leg brought a famous victory, with 36-year-old Gary McAllister scoring the only goal from the penalty spot following a Patrick Kluivert handball. It was to be Liverpool's first European final in 16 years. "We could always take big scalps," smiles Carragher. "That was the great thing about that team – we may not have been the best, but we could beat the best."

They were also repeating the trick domestically, working their way to the FA Cup final against Arsenal, back at the Millennium Stadium. Owen went into the game in peak form: in his previous two matches he'd scored three goals against Newcastle, then two against Chelsea.

Liverpool faced a Gunners side above them in the league table, and Wenger's side dominated for the most part. Arsenal had three shots blocked on the line – one by Henchoz's hand, which went unnoticed by the match officials – and once Freddie Ljungberg had rounded Sander Westerveld to put Arsenal in front with 18 minutes remaining, time was rapidly running out for the Reds. Nobody was prepared for what happened next – except perhaps one man.

In the 83rd minute, McAllister launched a free-kick into the penalty area, Markus Babbel nodded the ball down and Owen found space in the crowd to fire in the equaliser. He looks back on that moment now with something approaching reverence; that it was meant to be, even when playing rope-a-dope in the blazing Welsh sun.

"Once I scored that first goal, I jogged back to the halfway line and this feeling came over me: I just knew," he reveals. "It was like the Ali fight when Foreman was smacking him on the ropes and it seemed impossible, but suddenly, one punch and I knew that Arsenal were gone. The only question in my mind was, 'Have I got enough time to score before the final whistle goes?' It wasn't 'if', it was 'when'. I'd never had that feeling before, and I've never felt it since."

Was there time for a winner? Barely five minutes later, Owen had his answer. He latched onto a long pass from Patrik Berger, shrugging off Lee Dixon, before one touch took him away from Tony Adams. On his weaker foot, Owen coolly dispatched a shot into the small gap just beyond David Seaman's outstretched left hand. Michael Owen had won the FA Cup. The forward-flip goal celebration; the screaming, wide-eyed delight; the mayhem in the stands – it all belonged to him.

"It was such a magical day," he says. "It's funny: good things happen and you get caught up in the joy of winning for your team-mates and fans. There's nothing bad about it when you have a day like that."

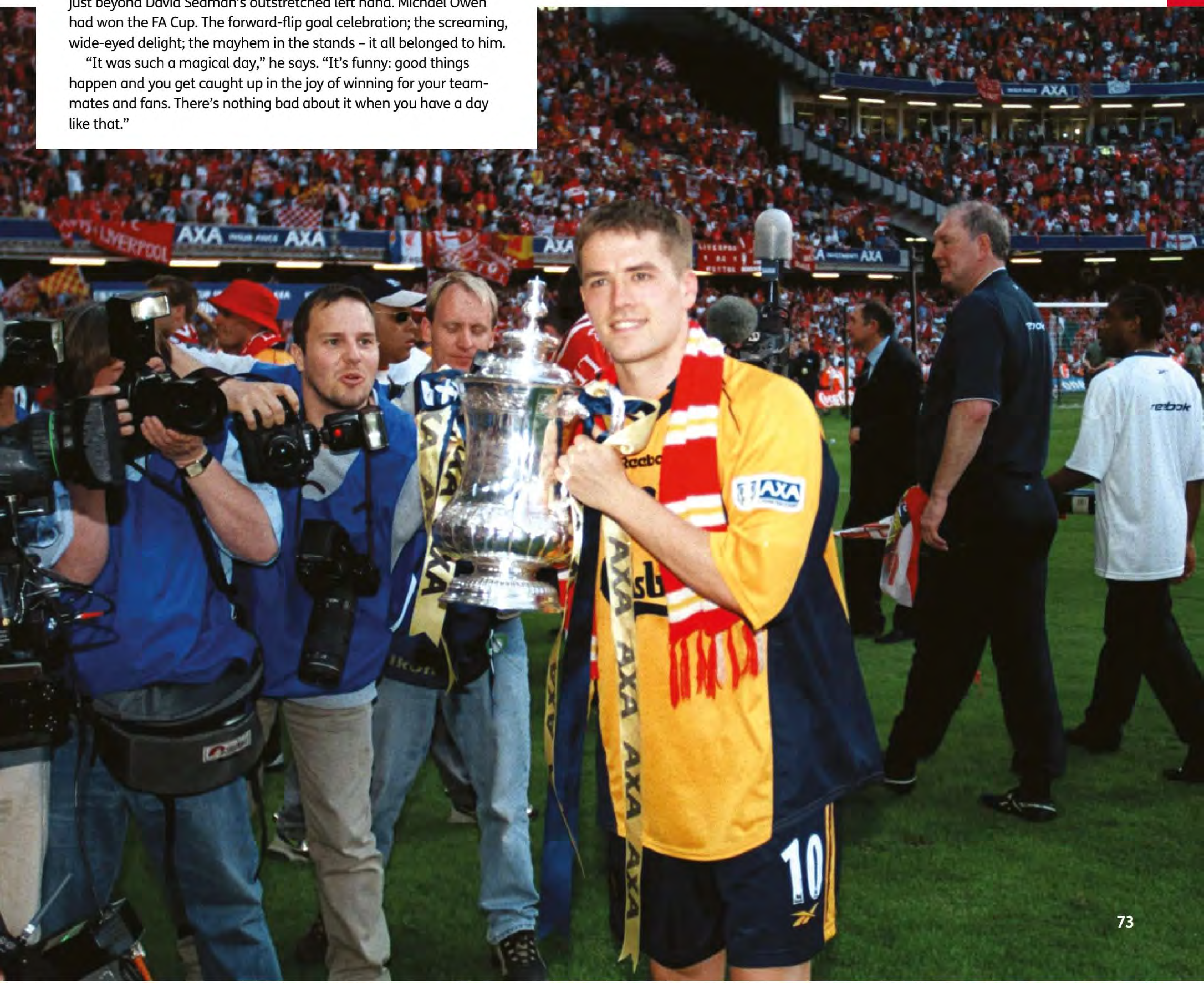
"ALL I THOUGHT WAS, 'IS THERE TIME FOR A WINNER?' IT WASN'T 'IF', IT WAS 'WHEN'"

Days were becoming a precious commodity at Liverpool. They had only three of them between the FA Cup showpiece in Cardiff and their third final of the campaign, against Alavés in the UEFA Cup. The club from Vitoria-Gasteiz, capital city of the Basque Country, were the big surprise package of the season: they had triumphed 2-0 at the San Siro against an Inter team boasting Christian Vieri and Clarence Seedorf, before shellacking Kaiserslautern 9-2 on aggregate.

Although Liverpool's players were now feeling the strains of a long season, they were quickly 2-0 up in Dortmund thanks to Babbel and Gerrard. Alavés pulled a goal back, but Owen tumbled in the box and McAllister converted the penalty. Houllier's side led 3-1 at the interval.

"I always remember coming into the dressing room, looking around and almost giggling," Owen admits to *FFT*. "Some of us were thinking, 'How good is this? It's almost a gimme'. You're expecting the final to be hard, and at half-time I was thinking that they were so easy to beat. Never, ever have I been so wrong. We almost blew it."

Far left Owen took Roma apart on their own turf
Below An FA Cup winner, having turned the final on its head in the dying seconds of the game





"I WAS GIGGLING AT HALF-TIME. YOU THINK A FINAL WILL BE HARD; THIS WAS A GIMME"

Above Winning the penalty for old man McAllister to convert in the UEFA Cup final

Six minutes into the second half, the score was 3-3. Liverpool's solid defence was suddenly a shambles. Fowler put them back in front, only for Jordi Cruyff to glance home another Alavés equaliser in the final minute of normal time. "On the way to the final, everyone was saying we were boring – lots of 0-0s and 1-0s – and then it all just went mad in the final!" recalls Carragher with a laugh.

In the end, Liverpool and Owen were able to complete their treble. Alavés had two men sent off in extra time, then Delfi Geli's own goal gave the Reds a dramatic 5-4 win via the short-lived golden goal rule. It was the club's first European trophy since Rome in 1984.

"It was where the club needed to be," explains Owen. "It was such a buzz. The fans were amazing – it felt like we'd taken a million of them to Dortmund."

It was also an important moment for Houllier. "He was desperate to win the UEFA Cup, to put us back on the European map," adds Owen. "He understood the club's history and values."

After two knackering cup finals, there was still a final Premier League match to play in May. Win at Charlton, and Liverpool would be in the Champions League for the first time, back in Europe's elite competition for the first time since that fateful night at Heysel.

Three days after the UEFA Cup final, Liverpool emerged 4-0 victors at The Valley. Owen set up Murphy to net the third and scored the fourth himself. The Reds had come 3rd in the table, 11 points off champions Manchester United but down from 24 the previous campaign. "We'd won all those trophies that season and went away that summer proud as punch," says Owen. "We just needed one or two more players to get a bit better. We wanted to win the league with Liverpool so much. Me and Carra used to speak about it all the time. The desire within us was almost unbearable."

Owen had the same desire to achieve something with England. With the summer over, and the 2001–02 season only one month old, the national team travelled to Munich to take on Germany in a World Cup qualifier. Trailing to a sixth-minute Carsten Jancker goal, Sven-Göran Eriksson's men were soon back on level terms, with Owen finding the empty net after Nick Barmby had beaten Oliver Kahn to a high ball. Gerrard put England in front and then Owen ran riot, lashing a strike past a flat-footed Kahn before charging clear to wrap up his hat-trick (club team-mate Emile Heskey finished the rout).

His destruction of Germany in their own back yard confirmed what many had suspected for a while: 21-year-old Owen was indeed one of Europe's most dangerous marksman. In December came recognition of that fact, as Owen was named the winner of the 2001 Ballon d'Or. He received a total of 176 votes from a panel of sports journalists across UEFA's member countries. Raúl was second with 140 votes, Kahn third with 114 and David Beckham fourth with 102. Francesco Totti, Luís Figo, Rivaldo, Andriy Shevchenko, Thierry Henry and Zinedine Zidane filled out the top 10, but none of them received even a third of Owen's total votes.

Owen may not have been able to call himself the best player in the world – only in 2007 did the Ballon d'Or become a global award – but he could officially proclaim himself the best player in Europe. He was only the fourth Englishman to receive the honour and the first since Kevin Keegan, a back-to-back winner with Hamburg in 1978 and '79.

Back in 2001, however, there was very little fanfare about Owen's prestigious achievement. In England, the cult of the individual had yet to take hold. Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo had yet to emerge. Owen wasn't even presented with the award at Anfield until April, on the pitch a few minutes before a run-of-the-mill 2-0 win over Derby. Owen scored twice that day, but that was as far as the celebrations went. No gala ceremony. No garish designer tux.

"I believe I don't get the sort of credit that other people would get for winning the Ballon d'Or," Owen admits today. "It's never been that important in our country.

"When I was in Spain, they said I was a hero for winning it. I'm immensely proud of winning it. I look down the list of names, and I still have it saved on my phone – a photo of the points system and who was second, third, fourth and the rest of it.

"You look at that list and it's awe-inspiring. That's all I ever wanted as a kid. I didn't just want to be a footballer; I wanted to be the best footballer. Winning it feels better now than it did when I was playing. You're 22 – it's just another trophy, and now I've got to win it again."

He never did, of course. Injuries, bad luck and Liverpool's below-par signings didn't help, as finishing runners-up to Arsenal in the 2001–02 season was followed by a slide down the table.

"We brought in El Hadji Diouf, Salif Diao and Bruno Cheyrou – guys who were expected to propel us, and it just went totally the opposite way," says Carragher.

Owen and his team-mates struggled to push on from that cup treble of 2000–01 and Houllier eventually departed in 2004, having appeared to run out of ideas. When the chance of a fresh start presented itself to Owen that summer – and at Real Madrid, no less – the 24-year-old was ready to listen.

"The last thing I thought was that I was going to leave Liverpool," says Owen. "We were on a pre-season tour in America and my agent phoned me while I was in my room with Carragher, who got wind of what we were talking about. I put down the phone and he said, 'Pffft, don't go. They've got Raúl, Ronaldo and Fernando Morientes – you won't get a game!'

"I was 50-50, but I just had this overriding feeling towards it – and I'm blaming Ian Rush, actually! I thought, 'If I do go, then I've already played for Liverpool for a long time and, hopefully, I could always come back, so just go and sample it – the Galácticos; that white kit, where everyone prances out like an angel; that amazing stadium; a different culture'.

"Eventually I agreed. But do you know when you sign something and think there's no going back? When you think, 'Oh my God, what have I done?' I remember crying my eyes out as I went off to the airport, thinking, 'What am I leaving behind?'"

Owen stops short of using the word 'regret', but leaving Liverpool still weighs heavily on him – as does the rather mixed opinions of some on the Anfield terraces towards their former player. His fine international career possibly didn't help, never quite shaking the sense that he was England's Michael Owen rather than Liverpool's Michael Owen. Nor did that squeaky-clean image, with all of the rough edges smoothed out by PRs and agents.

John Gibbons, of Liverpool fan site and podcast *The Anfield Wrap*, thinks that it's probably down to sheer numbers – that, and signing for Manchester United in 2009.

"We've always been spoilt for strikers," says Gibbons. "We've found it a lot more difficult to find a decent left-back over the past 20 years than a centre-forward. That allows people to discard Michael Owen too easily. Robbie Fowler was more loved, but Owen was brilliant for Liverpool. He would always put so much into it when he was on the pitch. You could tell that he was desperate to win.

"I can understand why he gets so frustrated, because he probably sees players spoken of a lot more fondly when they didn't put in half the work he did. A lot of it is about what happened afterwards. Going to Real Madrid didn't go down very well, then when he came back to England and joined Newcastle, it was a surprise. But it was signing for Manchester United that really severed all ties."

Carragher believes his former room-mate's heroics of 2001 should place him alongside the Anfield greats; that he should get more love from the club's fanbase. "I think in time that will come," he suggests.

Until someone plying their trade in the famous red of Liverpool does get their hands on the ultimate individual prize in football (Sadio Mané came second in the voting in 2022 prior to moving to Bayern Munich), then for all of their legends, for all of the club's European glory, only one player has ever bagged the Ballon d'Or while playing for the club. Michael Owen.

Below "You know when you sign something and think, 'Oh my God, what have I done?' I cried my eyes out as I went to the airport to fly to Madrid"



CAPTAIN MARVEL

Steven Gerrard joined Liverpool as a nine-year-old boy and left as a legend – and possibly the Reds' greatest ever player

Words Mark White



© Getty Images

Andrea Pirlo could have ended up playing with a Liverpool-born midfield general rather than Gennaro Gattuso if circumstances were different.

"Carlo Ancelotti came to me and said, 'I want to sign Steven Gerrard to play next to you in midfield – what do you think?'" the king of cool once claimed of his time at AC Milan, telling his manager immediately to do it. Pirlo saw Gerrard as the most complete midfielder in Europe. Of course he'd want to play alongside him at the San Siro.

But Pirlo wasn't the only one; José Mourinho infamously looked to bring Gerrard to Chelsea – undeterred by the cliché that he couldn't play alongside Frank Lampard – and apparently came very close to succeeding. Even after leaving west London, he was infatuated with Stevie G.

"I tried to bring him to Chelsea, I tried to bring him to Inter, I tried to bring him to Real Madrid, but he was always a dear enemy," Mourinho would later say.

Gerrard really was a complete player. He certainly had the tenacity and intelligence to play in Inter Milan's treble-winning side and compete in Italian football, while his technical ability was superb, fitting of a Galáctico at Real. He would have been able to thrive in any team.

However, it was the one character trait that plenty in modern football lack that meant he never did get to play for Milan, Chelsea or Real Madrid.

"I remember asking Carlo a few weeks later how it was going, and he told me Gerrard had given a very firm no, that his bond with Liverpool was unbreakable," Pirlo continued. "At the time, Milan were the champions of Europe and probably had the best team in the world. It says a lot about Gerrard's loyalty."

Gerrard was too nervous to really play with any kind of freedom in the early days of his Liverpool

"IS HE THE BEST IN THE WORLD? I THINK HE JUST MIGHT BE"

ZINEDINE ZIDANE





Left A fresh-faced Steven Gerrard burst onto the scene in the late 1990s **Below** Gerrard races away to celebrate after scoring against Manchester United in a 3-0 win at Old Trafford in 2014



career. Wearing an oversized red shirt that looked like it belonged to his dad, the youngster made his debut against Blackburn in 1998 and played a handful more times in the absence of Jamie Redknapp, who was struggling with injury. Gerrard could play centre-midfield or on the right, but he didn't feel fully at home just yet.

"I was out of position and out of my depth," he'd confess ten years later, seeing himself more as a defensive player. But Liverpool coaches saw something in him and told him to keep plugging away. In 1999, Gerrard would replace Paul Ince in the middle of the park and start playing alongside Redknapp a lot more.

It wasn't always easy in those early months at Anfield, however. Gerrard scored his first senior goal in a 4-1 thumping of Sheffield Wednesday, looking lively and energetic whenever he was called upon. But back and groin problems plagued him that season, necessitating four operations just to get up to speed and continue his development.

The world was tuning in to Michael Owen more than Steven Gerrard, who was playing as a right-back on occasion, as well as on the right of a 4-4-2, but after more than a few false starts, Gerrard's luck began to change. After a call-up to the England squad for Euro 2000, the midfielder came onto the pitch for the win over Germany before taking that experience back to his club.

Above Gerrard buries a rocket in the 2006 FA Cup final against West Ham

Liverpool blew hot and cold before Christmas, but Gerrard had a stunning game against Arsenal in December during which Liverpool smashed the Gunners 4-0 at Anfield, with Gerrard scoring one of the goals. He'd net goals against Southampton and Aston Villa and play 78 minutes in the League Cup final against Birmingham City as the Reds won on penalties. In the run-in, he'd score one and set up another against Manchester United before racking up four goals and assists in the quarters and semi-finals of the FA Cup.

Gerrard was later named PFA Young Player of the Year by his peers after 50 starts in all competitions, with his season culminating in two more dramatic finals. First in the FA Cup, the Reds came back from a goal down to Arsenal in Cardiff as Michael Owen snatched the trophy. This was followed by an all-time classic against Alavés in Dortmund. Gerrard netted in the 5-4 thriller that Liverpool won with a Golden Goal, lifting the UEFA Cup for a unique treble and the first three tastes of silverware in a career that would yield so many more.

"I think that team, the front six – everybody chipped in," Jamie Carragher

later told *FourFourTwo*. "We didn't have a go-to player I think, not like Stevie was maybe five years later."

Sooner rather than later, Gerrard would ascend to a whole different level. He'd score his first England goal in September's 5-1 hammering of Germany in Munich and lift the Super Cup, but he missed Liverpool's 2-1 Charity Shield triumph over Manchester United thanks to an ankle injury. Even so, he was fast becoming the go-to man, and when Liverpool's greatest moment of need arrived in May 2005, he delivered.

With Liverpool 3-0 down to AC Milan in the European Cup final in Istanbul, Rafa Benítez looked at half-time to shore up his team and avoid embarrassment. It had been a rocky season, and this was looking like more of the same.

Liverpool had brought in the likes of Xabi Alonso and Luis García but let go of Michael Owen. With the Premier League more competitive than ever, the Reds struggled to gel. Between September and November, Gerrard missed out with a broken toe. The team suffered in his absence, yet the captain returned before Christmas to fire a late winner against Olympiacos in the Champions League and secure knockout football in Europe.

Yet despite these flashes of brilliance, consistency evaded Liverpool. They'd finish fifth in the Premier League – behind neighbours Everton – and go into that showpiece against Milan outside of the Champions League places. At half-time, they appeared to be all but out of the contest.

In the second half, Gerrard played further forward. Then the unthinkable happened: nine minutes into the half, Gerrard pulled one back. Two minutes later, Vladimír Šmicer netted another. Now just a goal behind,



Below Gerrard salutes fans after winning a dramatic Champions League final in Istanbul in 2005 **Bottom** Gerrard chases 2001 FA Cup final hero Michael Owen at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium

Liverpool pushed up in search of an equaliser. Just after the hour mark they would get the chance to score it when Gerrard raced through on goal only to be hauled down by a flailing Gattuso. Up stepped Alonso, and when his spot-kick was saved the Spaniard reacted quickest to rifle the rebound into the roof of the net. Somehow it was 3-3, and the scoreline would stay that way for the remainder of the match, meaning penalties would be required to settle an enthralling encounter.

With the pendulum of fate swinging decisively in their favour, Liverpool pulled off what has ever since been hailed as the 'Miracle of Istanbul'. It's also known as 'the Gerrard final' – perhaps the single greatest performance of anyone in any European final ever.

"It shouldn't have happened. Some of us aren't convinced it did," wrote the *Liverpool Echo*. "Only the pinch marks confirm it. We thought it was all over. It wasn't."

Gerrard had written his name into the history books, and he underlined it a few weeks later by turning down a lucrative move to Chelsea to stay on Merseyside. It was his second greatest comeback of that summer – as he told the world, he'd rather win one Premier League title with Liverpool than multiple at Chelsea.

By now he was one of the best players in the world. The following season he was voted the PFA Players' Player of the Year, the same campaign in which he delivered another 'Gerrard final' in the FA Cup against West Ham, thumping home a superb half-volley to make it 2-2 and then scoring a 35-yard screamer in the dying seconds to make it 3-3 to send another showpiece to penalties. Liverpool won a tense shootout 3-1 to add another trophy to the cabinet.

Gerrard managed 38 goals and assists in the 2005–06 season and came third in the Ballon d'Or vote behind Barcelona's Ronaldinho and Chelsea's Frank Lampard. In 2006–07 he guided Liverpool to another Champions League final against AC Milan. This time, there was no miracle.

Despite his stunning accomplishments, Gerrard was still underappreciated by many. Even Rafa Benítez was reluctant to heap praise on him. "He never gave Stevie Gerrard a 'well done', ever," Peter Crouch told *FFT*. This would only serve to spur the skipper on to work even harder.

In the following season Gerrard would score or assist ten times en route to a Champions League exit at the hands of Chelsea in the semi-finals as English football reigned supreme in Europe – indeed, the Premier League supplied the two finalists that year.

The season after that saw Gerrard tucked in behind Fernando Torres. Unshackled by defensive burdens, he scored or assisted 37 times in 44 games. These were numbers that had rarely been seen in English football, let alone from a midfielder.

Gerrard made his 100th appearance in European club competition in March 2009

against Real Madrid, scoring twice in a 4-0 win. He found the net again four days later in a 4-1 rout of Manchester United at a stunned Old Trafford to keep the title race alive. He'd score a hat-trick against Aston Villa that month, too.

"Is he the best in the world?" Zinedine Zidane asked of Gerrard during this pomp. "He might not get the attention of Messi and Ronaldo but yes, I think he just might be."

During this period Liverpool didn't lift any silverware, but individual accolades rained down on their captain. He was included in the FIFA FIFPro World XI from 2007 to 2009 and made the PFA Premier League Team of the Year from 2004 to 2009. Gerrard was awarded FWA Footballer of the Year in 2008–09, too. Despite the Spanish revolution that was about to propel La Roja to three major tournament victories in a row, Torres believed that his captain was better than anyone else.

"He's as creative as a Xavi at Barcelona, with something extra as well," the striker said. "When you add his energy, toughness, leadership and goalscoring ability the result is a fantastic all-round player. He is without doubt the greatest player I have ever played with."

In 2012, Gerrard played his 250th match as Liverpool captain. It seemed strange to imagine anyone else ever wearing the armband. Two years later, deep into his 30s, the skipper had reinvented himself in Brendan Rodgers' side – just as Pirlo had done in Italy. Gerrard would rake balls forward like a quarter-back, playing deeper in midfield, just as he'd always envisioned, the fulcrum of a side who grew into the season slowly.



Above Chelsea fans applaud Gerrard off the pitch in 2015 **Below** Gerrard poses with the 2006 PFA Player of the Year award

Between September and Christmas, he racked up ten goals and assists, including a sublime assist for Daniel Sturridge against Fulham in a game that was ultimately won 3-2 courtesy of a 91st-minute Gerrard penalty. After Christmas, he managed a whopping 18 goals and assists as Liverpool went 16 games unbeaten, winning 11 on the trot. During this potent spell he registered another two assists in a 5-1 battering of Arsenal at Anfield on 8 February 2014, and then scored two penalties (and missed another) in a 3-0 defeat of Manchester United at Old Trafford in mid-March to complete the double over their hated rivals.

Liverpool looked set to finally end decades of hurt and clinch an elusive Premier League title, but sadly it wasn't to be. The dream died on a torrid April afternoon at home to Chelsea, and in the cruellest of twists, it was a rare Gerrard misstep that wrecked Liverpool's hopes.

With Liverpool dominating the game, Gerrard slipped as he attempted to control a routine pass near the centre circle, enabling Demba Ba to race clear and put Chelsea ahead. Willian would wrap up the three points with a stoppage-time strike to hand Manchester City the initiative, an advantage they would hold onto as they ran out title winners by two points. Victory against Chelsea, it transpired, would have been enough for Liverpool. The Reds captain was devastated, but no one blamed him.

"Stevie's the best player Liverpool's ever seen," former teammate Glen Johnson told *FFT* ten years later. "If it could happen to him, it could happen to anyone."

Gerrard led England to one last major tournament that summer as captain. The following season would be one in which Luis Suárez's absence was keenly felt. On New Year's Day, Gerrard announced that he would finally be leaving Liverpool and heading Stateside to join LA Galaxy.

In 710 games in that famous red, Gerrard scored 186 goals from midfield, but he dragged his team back from the brink more times than probably even he can remember. He summed up the ethos of never giving up. No one at Liverpool ever walked alone while he was captain.

For everything that he gave in pursuit of perfection, Gerrard is remembered at Liverpool not for his rocket shots, his sumptuous passing, positioning, technical prowess or intelligence on the football field; he's remembered for his heart, loyalty and passion while playing for the Reds. He will always be Mr Liverpool. He could never have played for anyone else.



PA Images/Alamy/Dave Thompson

11 MEMORABLE LIVERPOOL MOMENTS

We select 11 of the most important events in the history of the club, on and off the pitch

Words Rob Clark

Some eight years after their bitter city rivals, Everton, had moved into Anfield in 1894, Liverpool FC were the beneficiaries of a falling out between the board and John Houlding, club president and owner of the land around Anfield. Everton decided they didn't want to pay the increased rent Houlding was proposing to charge and moved out. Houlding promptly formed a new club. His attempts to retain the name 'Everton' failed, so he instead called his new team 'Liverpool' when he formed it in March 1892. Some three months later, they gained official recognition from the FA, and Liverpool were on their way.

There is so much about Liverpool as a club that makes it unique. Its love affair with the European Cup; its relationship with its fans, a bond forged through the most remarkable achievements and the most terrible tragedies; its approach to appointing key staff from people already working within the club (and others who intuitively understand what the 'Liverpool Way' really means); its iconic Anfield home; its moving anthem – all combine to make it one of a kind.

> "THERE IS SO MUCH ABOUT LIVERPOOL AS A CLUB THAT MAKES IT UNIQUE"

When your club has won so many trophies, it's an impossible task to pick just 11 moments that define their success, let alone their whole history. Here, then, is a totally non-definitive list of seismic events that have shaped Liverpool. No doubt many will argue about them all, privately cherishing different moments that mean everything to them...

Jack Balmer's feat has never since been equalled in England's top flight

A HAT-TRICK OF HAT-TRICKS

November 1946

11 The 1946–47 season was the first after World War II, and Liverpool were quick to pull together an impressive front three. Albert Stubbins was signed from Newcastle for a then club record fee of £12,500. He immediately formed a highly successful partnership with Jack Balmer (front row, third from right), with Billy Liddell providing a plentiful supply of crosses from the left wing.

Liddell was probably the most celebrated of the three, but it was to be Balmer who set the quite phenomenal record of scoring hat-tricks in three successive matches.

Against Portsmouth on 9 November 1946, a first-half penalty was supplemented by further goals in the 70th and 79th minute in a 3-0 win. The match against Derby County at the Baseball Ground a week later saw Balmer score his hat-trick in the six minutes between the 43rd and 49th minutes. He added a fourth on the hour. On 23 November, at home to Arsenal, Balmer scored early in the 15th minute and again in the 61st and 68th minutes.

KING KENNY ARRIVES

10 August 1977

10 When, midway through the 1976–77 season, Liverpool legend Kevin Keegan announced his plans to move abroad to play, many fans were distraught – he was considered irreplaceable. His replacement was Kenny Dalglish.

Dalglish had been a huge success at Celtic, but Celtic wasn't Liverpool. Dalglish quickly found his way into fans' hearts, however, scoring on his league debut on 20 August 1977 against Middlesbrough. A mere three days later, he scored on his Anfield debut in the 2-0 win over Newcastle United. By the end of that first season, Dalglish had scored 31 goals in 62 games, including the winner in the European Cup final against Club Brugge. If ever there was a way to gain instant approval from the Kop, it was enabling the club to retain the European Cup, especially as it was played at Wembley.

Dalglish went on to have a fantastic career at Liverpool, winning trophy after trophy, and his partnership with Ian Rush was one of the most lethal ever seen. Keegan will always be a huge favourite at the club, but irreplaceable? No.



Above
Kenny Dalglish (right) signs on the dotted line for Liverpool

LIVERPOOL ADOPT ALL-RED STRIP

25 November 1964

09 Younger fans may not recall, but for the first 72 years of Liverpool's existence, the team wore red shirts teamed with white shorts (with red trim) and white socks (with red tops).

On 25 November 1964, the players emerged for a game against Anderlecht wearing red shorts. There is some dispute over whether they were also in red socks – website *This Is Anfield* claims they were, though reports in the *Liverpool Echo* suggest otherwise. But what is beyond doubt is that on 16 December, in Belgium for the return leg, red socks were definitely being worn.

Manager Bill Shankly, who was tireless in his quest for an edge, thought that it would make a statement. He later said that his team "looked and played like giants".

Although they were already known as the Reds, that night sealed the deal and established the all-red kit not only in fans' minds but in the minds of every other football team and their supporters.



Sharon Latham/Manchester United via Getty Images

FIRST LEAGUE TITLE

29 April 1901

08 Liverpool's ascent after founder John Houlding received official recognition in 1892 was precipitous. Starting off in the Lancashire League, which they won, they moved into the Football League Second Division for the start of the 1893–94 season. Three years later, they were promoted to the First Division and Tom Watson was appointed manager.

Like many Liverpool bosses since, Watson was ahead of his time. He'd already managed Sunderland to a title and was enticed to the club by the offer of a salary of £300, making him the highest-paid manager in England at the time.

Watson led Liverpool to their first league title in the 1900–01 season and to their second in 1905–06, though they did spend the 1904–05 season in the Second Division before roaring back to claim their first title.

That looked unlikely at one point, but an astonishing run of nine wins and three draws in their final 12 matches won them the title, pipping Sunderland by two points. That was their last title before World War I broke out and the league was suspended.



Werner OTTO/ullstein bild via Getty Images

NEW LOOK, SAME VIBE

9 September 2016

07 The club first announced plans to move to a new Stanley Park Stadium in 2002, but when George Gillett and Tom Hicks took the club over in February 2007, they first changed the design and then declared that they couldn't afford the redesign anyway.

To fans' relief the Fenway Sports Group came in and swiftly announced that they would be looking at redeveloping and expanding the club's current home rather than moving to a new site.

It was a slow process because the club needed to buy up a number of privately owned properties around the stadium. Construction of the new Main Stand increased capacity from roughly 45,000 to 54,000, and the ongoing expansion of the Anfield Road end will add a further 7,000, taking the overall capacity to 61,000.

Given the scale of these upgrades, it's impressive that the ground's identity has been so well preserved. The Kop is still there, the Koppites still sing their favourite songs, and the stadium still feels intimidating to visiting teams. Few will bet against many more red-letter days at Anfield.



'YOU'LL NEVER WALK ALONE'

1963

06 The iconic song was a hit for Liverpudlian group Gerry and the Pacemakers in 1963, for whom it spent four weeks at number one. Shankly was quick to adopt it as his club's unofficial anthem, selecting it as one of his favourite songs on *Desert Island Discs* in 1965 on the eve of that year's FA Cup final.

Then, prior to the match, commentator Kenneth Wolstenholme referred to it as "Liverpool's signature tune". The subsequent 2-1 extra time win over Leeds was, remarkably, the club's first FA Cup triumph, and it all added to the perfect storm building behind the song becoming Liverpool's.

In fact, the song's origins stretch further back to the 1945 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *Carousel*. Gerry Marsden heard something in it that made him think it could be a pop hit and convinced his manager, Brian Epstein (of Beatles fame) and producer George Martin (ditto) to let him release a cover version.

Marsden rightly predicted a hit, but even in his wildest dreams he surely can never have imagined that it would become such an integral part of his city's football team – the words are written in wrought iron on the Shankly Gates and form part of the club's crest on the players' shirts.

There is nothing in football quite like tens of thousands of fans at Anfield launching into a stirring rendition of 'You'll Never Walk Alone'.





EUROPE FALLS

25 May 1977

05 It's 25 May 1977, and the European Cup final, hosted in the Stadio Olimpico in Rome, is 28 minutes old. Liverpool's intensity and physical presence has seen them dominate the first half-hour and take the lead courtesy of a Terry McDermott strike. Instead of pressing their advantage home, however, Liverpool allow German side Borussia Mönchengladbach back into the match. Seven minutes after half-time, prolific Danish striker Allan Simonsen – who was named the 1977 European Player of the Year – scores a superb solo goal to level the match.

Both sides have further chances, and a Tommy Smith header from a corner puts Liverpool back in front after 65 minutes. The Reds wrap up victory in the 82nd minute when, having had two good earlier appeals for a penalty turned down, Phil Neal makes it 3-1 from the spot.

What that first European Cup triumph (Liverpool had already won the UEFA Cup twice) signified was as important as the victory itself: an affinity for the European Cup (and now the Champions League) that has seen Liverpool go on to win the trophy twice as many times as any other British club (and of all the competitors, only Real Madrid and AC Milan have won more European Cups). Famous victories in 1981 and 1984 cemented Liverpool's place as one of the finest teams of the '80s during a spell of English dominance, and further European crowns followed in 2005 and 2019.

"SEVEN MINUTES AFTER HALF-TIME, ALLAN SIMONSEN SCORED A SUPERB SOLO GOAL TO LEVEL THE MATCH"

DALGLISH'S DOUBLE

10 May 1986

04 Manager Joe Fagan resigned in the wake of the Heysel Stadium disaster in 1985, saying that the club needed a rebuild and that as he was approaching his mid-sixties he didn't think he was the man to do it. Liverpool took the unusual step of appointing Kenny Dalglish as their first ever player-manager, and that 'gamble' paid off handsomely.

It's easy to forget now that they looked anything but champions-elect during the first half of the 1985–86 season. Dalglish had replaced the long-serving full-backs Phil Neal and Alan Kennedy with Steve Nicol and Jim Beglin, and the Reds only managed three clean sheets in their first ten games. But a phenomenal run at the end of the season resulted in 11 wins from 12 and climaxed in a 1-0 victory against Chelsea at Stamford Bridge to clinch the title. No prizes for guessing who scored the only goal.

10 May saw the first Merseyside derby FA Cup final. Gary Lineker opened the scoring for Everton, but the game was decided by two second-half goals from Ian Rush that sandwiched a strike from Craig Johnston.

In his very first season in charge, 34-year-old Dalglish had led his club to the first league and cup double in their history. If his legend needed any more burnishing, here was the proof that he is the greatest player in the club's long and storied history.



CUP MAGIC

20 May 1989

03 In the wake of the terrible tragedy that was the Hillsborough Disaster, it was entirely fitting that the FA Cup final should feature the two Merseyside clubs for a second time in just four years. Both sides wore black armbands and before kick-off Gerry Marsden led the Wembley crowd in a poignant rendition of 'You'll Never Walk Alone'.

It took John Aldridge just four minutes to score his 30th goal of the season in all competitions. For a further 86 minutes that seemed to be that, despite Liverpool having numerous chances to kill the game off. In the final minute of the match, Stuart McCall, who had signed for Everton at the start of the season but had failed to score in his 33 league appearances, equalised in a goalmouth scramble and the delirious Everton fans spilled out onto the pitch.

The match moved into extra time, and that's when things went a bit bonkers. First, Ian Rush restored Liverpool's lead in the 95th minute with a smart turn and finish, only to see McCall once more equalise by chesting the ball down and volleying into the corner past Bruce Grobbelaar from the edge of the penalty area. If Everton had gone on to win the match, it would have been acclaimed as one of the great cup final goals, but instead, two minutes later, Rush matched McCall's two-goal haul when he got on the end of a cross from John Barnes to make it 3-2. With no further goals in the second half of extra time, Liverpool lifted the FA Cup once more.

Maybe that was always destined to be the outcome, but it was a massively emotional conclusion to the most traumatic of times. "This game has meant more to me than any other game in which I've been involved," said Dalglish. And to many others.





THE MIRACLE OF ISTANBUL

25 May 2005

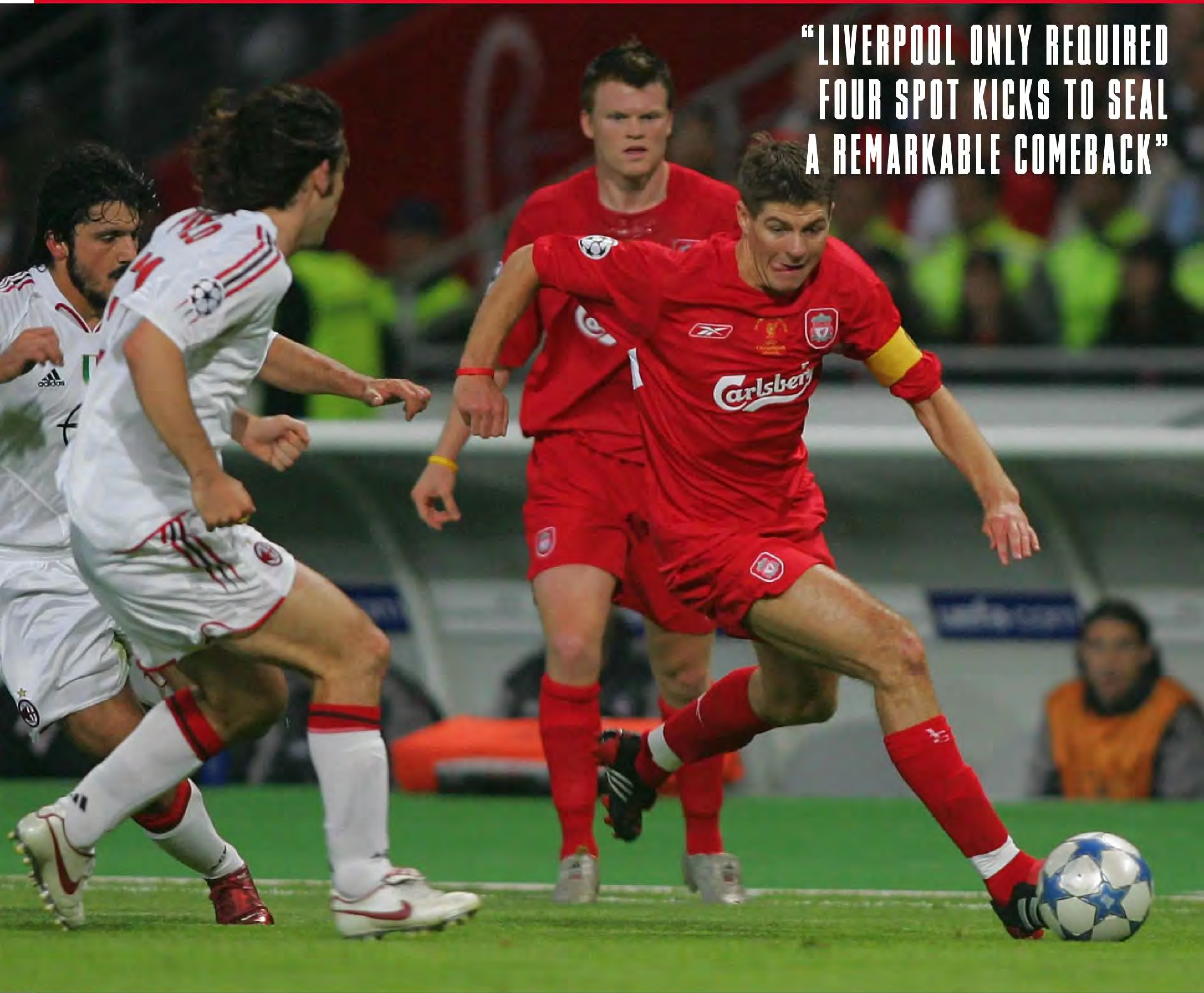
02 The 2004–05 season looked like it would end up being a disappointing one for Liverpool. They finished fifth in the league (outside Champions League qualification) and were knocked out of the FA Cup in the third round by Burnley (who finished 17th in the Championship). The League Cup was marginally more fruitful, as Liverpool progressed to the final, but a first-minute opener from John Arne Riise was cancelled out by an own goal from, of all people, Steven Gerrard. Chelsea scored two extra-time goals to one from Antonio Núñez to win 3-2.

The Champions League also proved something of a struggle. Even a qualifying round tie against Grazer AK of Austria was won just 2-1, and the group stages saw away defeats in both Monaco and Olympiacos. That left the Reds needing to win their final match, at home to the Greek side, and they only managed that by virtue of late goals from Neil Mellor and Gerrard. The only decisive victory came in the Last 16 stage, where they defeated Leverkusen home and away for a resounding 6-2 aggregate victory. Narrow wins over Juventus and Chelsea took Liverpool to the final in Istanbul – their first in 20 years – to face a star-studded AC Milan side.

Inspired by a first-minute goal from captain Paolo Maldini, Milan had Liverpool chasing shadows as they produced some sumptuous football. Two further goals from Argentina striker Hernán Crespo saw Milan go into the break 3-0 up. The start of the second half was no more successful, but suddenly nine minutes into it, the kickstart Liverpool needed arrived. Not for the first – or last – time it came from Gerrard, with a glancing but powerful header into the far corner of the goal.

Two minutes later, Vladimír Šmicer, on as an early substitute for the injured Harry Kewell, slotted home a second with a sweet strike from outside the box that cut across Brazilian goalkeeper Dida. Five minutes later Gerrard was brought down in the area, handing Xabi Alonso's the chance to equalise. His right-footed spot kick was saved, but he followed up with his left to knock in the rebound.

Weirdly, given what had gone before, there was no further scoring by either team in the last half-hour of normal time or the 30 minutes of extra time. With Milan missing three of their five penalties, Liverpool required only four spot kicks to seal a remarkable comeback and take home their fifth European Cup.



"LIVERPOOL ONLY REQUIRED FOUR SPOT KICKS TO SEAL A REMARKABLE COMEBACK"



THE BOOT ROOM

1960s–1990s

01 The individual achievements and exploits of Shankly, Paisley, Fagan and others associated with the 'Boot Room' are detailed elsewhere in these pages, but that should not take away from the cumulative impact of the establishment of the legendary Anfield Boot Room and how it set the template for all Liverpool managers for ever more.

The post-war period had not been a success for Liverpool. Although they won the first league title on the competition's resumption, the rest of the 1940s and the entirety of the 1950s didn't yield a single trophy. Huddersfield Town manager Shankly came in, with his early changes being to forensically examine the team and to convert a boot storage room into a meeting place for him and his coaching team to get together and discuss strategy. And so the legendary Boot Room was born.

Shankly's successor, Paisley, described it as a safe place to say whatever you really thought: "What went on was kept within those four walls." Fagan, Dalglish and Roy Evans were other future managers who adorned the Boot Room, which became a byword for Liverpool's desire to promote from within. That enabled all the coaching staff to be privy to the 'Liverpool Way', and a seamless transition could be made whenever a change of leadership took place. It also meant that original member Ronnie Moran could step in as caretaker manager on more than one occasion and keep the wheels turning until the next permanent manager could be appointed.

Members of the Boot Room admitted that all manner of football-related subjects were talked about in there, from injuries and training drills to an opponent's strengths and weaknesses. The size of the Boot Room by necessity kept the numbers invited low and meant that all members of the inner circle were involved in every aspect of the team.

Over its 40-year run, the Boot Room delivered 30 major trophies for the club. Even after time was called on its physical presence – during the reign of Graeme Souness – its influence remains evident in every aspect of how the club is managed. The Liverpool Way still has a tangible impact, and in Jürgen Klopp the club found a manager who 'got it'.

Despite his not coming from inside the club, Klopp is a worthy successor because he has fully bought into the club's ethos. Although he has a much larger team of coaches than in the Boot Room era, its founding principles remain the ones that guide the club, through thick and thin.

FROM THE
FourFourTwo
ARCHIVES



"I WAS IN A TRANCE IN ISTANBUL. I WAS TELLING MYSELF, 'YOU'VE WAITED FOR THIS MOMENT YOUR WHOLE LIFE – DON'T F**K IT UP'"

The most dramatic match of the noughties produced an unlikely hero. In his own words, Jerzy Dudek explains how he overcame hard times at Liverpool to become a Champions League legend – and later almost hit Rafa Benítez in the face

Interview Martin Harasimowicz

Arsène Wenger called me, and he was furious. He was nearly yelling. I'd joined Liverpool, not Arsenal. After five years with Feyenoord, I was ready for a fresh challenge. That summer, I'd spent a couple of days in London and Wenger showed me Highbury and the training ground. It was a beautiful visit – we agreed terms and shook hands. I went back to Rotterdam, then Wenger phoned me. "I'm really sorry," he said. "Feyenoord want £10 million and we don't pay that amount of money, not even for a striker." The deal was off, and I was angry. Then three matches into the new season, Liverpool came in and I moved to Anfield – for £5.75 million. "What the hell is going on?" Wenger asked me when he called. "I offered £7.5 million and Feyenoord said no!" I said, "I'm sorry – I had nothing to do with it." Joining Liverpool was meant to be.



A few weeks after I signed, my mum brought me a Liverpool scarf. For ten years, it had hung on the wall above my bed in my old apartment. I'd travelled to an international tournament in Germany when I was 16 and stayed with a local family. They had the scarf and I really liked it, so they gave it to me. It was a precious gift, and I put it on my wall so I could look at it when I woke up every morning.

Liverpool were one of the most respected teams in Poland – they'd had a great battle against Widzew Łódź in the 1982-83 European Cup quarter-finals, and I remember watching them in the 1984 final when I was a kid, with Bruce Grobbelaar and his penalty shootout antics in Rome. I became a Reds fan, but I never dreamed that I would get to play for them in the future.

When I arrived, Gérard Houllier took me to the training ground where people like Kevin Keegan and Ian Rush had been before me. The place had the scent of the old, great Liverpool, and I visualised sitting next to those legends in that same dressing room.

I made my Champions League debut for the club a couple of weeks later, against Boavista at Anfield. It was on September 11 – the same day as the attack on the World Trade Center – and after the 1-1 draw I couldn't go back to Holland to pick up the rest of my bags because the airports were closed.

That season, we reached the quarter-finals but lost 4-3 on aggregate to eventual finalists Bayer Leverkusen. We were in total control of the second leg in Germany, but Houllier took off Didi Hamann so we could push on in attack, and it went wrong. I remember watching the final with some of my team-mates, saying,









"THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE SAVED RAFA'S JOB IN 2005. ONLY WINNING IN ISTANBUL PREVENTED HIM FROM GETTING THE SACK"

Clockwise from bottom The Reds get ready to go; two Hernán Crespo goals left Dudek & Co. needing a miracle in Istanbul; and the fans played their part

"We should be there instead of Leverkusen. We're a better team than them." That first season was the best individual year of my whole career. We ran Arsenal pretty close in the Premier League, and I was nominated for UEFA's Goalkeeper of the Year award alongside Oliver Kahn and Gianluigi Buffon.

The second season was very difficult. I'd gone to the 2002 World Cup with Poland and we came bottom of our group. I felt tired after that, but I didn't want to tell anyone at the club. Eventually, it all caught up with me. I made a mistake in a defeat at Middlesbrough – I dropped a cross and Gareth Southgate scored. Then against Manchester United, in a prestigious game, I committed an unbelievable blunder. I spilled a simple header and Diego Forlán scored. I didn't sleep for two nights after that – I knew I'd let the team down in one of the most important matches of the season.

Houllier said, "Don't worry, you'll be my first choice for the next game." It was a cup tie at home to Ipswich. At first I didn't want to play, but he told me I had to, so I could get over it.

My team-mates wore T-shirts saying "Dudek, you'll never walk alone", and the entire stadium was shouting it. That was very powerful. In the league, I had a few weeks out of the team, then we played Manchester United in the League Cup final. Houllier said, "I think you'll win this for us, and you'll be the man of the match... mark my words." He put a bit of pressure on me, but he was right! We won 2-0 in Cardiff, I was the man of the match, and I finally found inner peace again.

When Rafa Benítez arrived in 2004, it was a revolution. Previously in training, we'd saved our energy for the games. Rafa said, "No guys, we have to practise. If you work harder, you'll play harder during matches." We trained extremely hard, and some of the players didn't enjoy that. We spent loads of time in the weights room and on tactical analysis. Sometimes we had fitness sessions on the morning of the game. But we didn't get results. We lost game after game in the Premier League and finished fifth that season – the Champions League saved Benítez's job. Only winning in Istanbul prevented him from being sacked.

Personally I had a difficult season, because he rotated the No.1 shirt between myself and Chris Kirkland. In the famous Olympiacos game that sent us into the knockout stages, it was Chris who played, not me. I was hearing rumours twice a week that Rafa was going to buy a new keeper at the end of the season. I asked him but he said, "Absolutely not – I have full trust in both you and Chris."

In the last 16 of the Champions League, we got our revenge against Leverkusen, going through 6-2 on aggregate. In the second leg of the quarter-finals against Juventus, our strategy was simple: to get a 0-0 draw, having won the first game 2-1. We got it. Then in the semi-finals we played Chelsea, and everyone knew that Rafa and José Mourinho hated each other. People remember the second leg and Luis Garcia's goal – I obviously couldn't see from the other end of the pitch, but my father-in-law had a perfect angle up in one of the stands, and he said the ball definitely went in!

Before the final in Istanbul, I talked a lot to our goalkeeping coach, who showed me loads of data about how Milan players took penalties, just in case it went to a shootout. One day he gave me a CD featuring more than 100 penalty kicks from different Milan players. It included the Champions League final they'd won on penalties against Juventus at Old Trafford two years earlier.

Rafa told us, "Don't worry, Milan have an old team; they're physically vulnerable and the longer the season goes on, their football declines." Unfortunately, they shocked us with a first-minute goal [scored by Paolo Maldini] and dictated the start of the match, scoring two more from counterattacks.

We were all furious at half-time. It was a long walk to and from the dressing room, so we only had five or six minutes to go through things. A lot was happening. Rafa's assistant told us not to panic and to score as quickly as possible, to put some pressure on Milan.

Then magic happened. When we were walking back onto the field, the Liverpool fans got up and started singing 'You'll Never Walk Alone'. It was surreal. We saw it, and Steven Gerrard gathered the players in the centre circle. He said, "Did you f**king hear that?

"THE REFEREE COULD EASILY HAVE MADE PIRLO RETAKE HIS SHOOTOUT PENALTY – I WAS A GOOD METRE OFF MY GOAL LINE"

They've travelled thousands of miles to get here, so we've got to give them something back now. We have to!"

It was really motivating. Our fans never stopped believing. At many other clubs, they would have gone home at half-time. Steven headed in the first goal, turned to the stands and waved both arms around to tell the fans, 'This is helping – give us some more!' A volcano erupted – we scored three goals in six minutes.

There was still a long way to go, though, so I had to keep my focus. Late on in extra time, a header from a cross came rapidly towards me. At the time, I thought it was from Jon Dahl Tomasson. I managed to parry it, then fell backwards into the goal. While I was on the ground, I saw a Milan player approaching for the rebound. In a microsecond I thought, 'That's landed perfectly for him to put it in the net.' I tried to make myself big. I put my hand up and hoped for a miracle.

If Andriy Shevchenko had tried to chip the ball over me or place it in the other side of the goal, I would have had no chance. Only after the game did I understand why he closed his eyes and tried to smash it as hard as possible. The first header had come from him, not Tomasson. He was annoyed I'd saved it, so decided to hit the rebound as hard as he could. How did I save it? A little bit of intuition, a little bit of training and the holy hand of Pope John Paul II, who was from Poland and had died only a month before.

After that save, I stood up and screamed, "And now f**king what?" All of my frustration boiled over – dealing with Rafa, not playing earlier in the season, and speculation about Liverpool bringing in a new keeper. John Arne Riise ran over and gave me a kiss on the cheek. After that moment, I was in a trance. I was telling myself, "You've waited for this your whole life... don't f**k it up."

I approached the shootout with ultra confidence – more confidence than ever before. I talked to our goalkeeping coach, and the plan was for him to give me hand signals as each Milan player stepped forward. We'd dissected the goal into six zones, three on the left and three on the right. Based on the stats, he'd show me which of those zones they were most likely to shoot towards.

My job was to get into the penalty-taker's head as much as possible, so they'd follow their natural instincts, rather than make a different choice. I picked up the ball before each penalty and looked into their eyes. I moved on my line too, trying to be irritating. When Serginho blazed the first penalty over, I knew the strategy was working. I was so confident that I stopped looking at the goalkeeping coach's signals.

With Andrea Pirlo, I played the psychological game and got into his head. He was waiting for me to commit first. I didn't blink until the last moment, when he was already approaching the ball, so he didn't have enough of a run-up to hit it really hard. I took a step forward – a good metre in front of the line – and saved it. I didn't glance at the referee, in case he was thinking about ordering a retake. I just turned to the fans and put my arms in the air – the ref could easily have asked Pirlo to take that one again!

Then the impossible happened. For two months we'd been practising penalties – at the end of each training session, everyone had to score twice, and Rafa kept all of the stats in his notebook. Riise never missed once, but in Istanbul, Dida saved his penalty – I had more work to do.

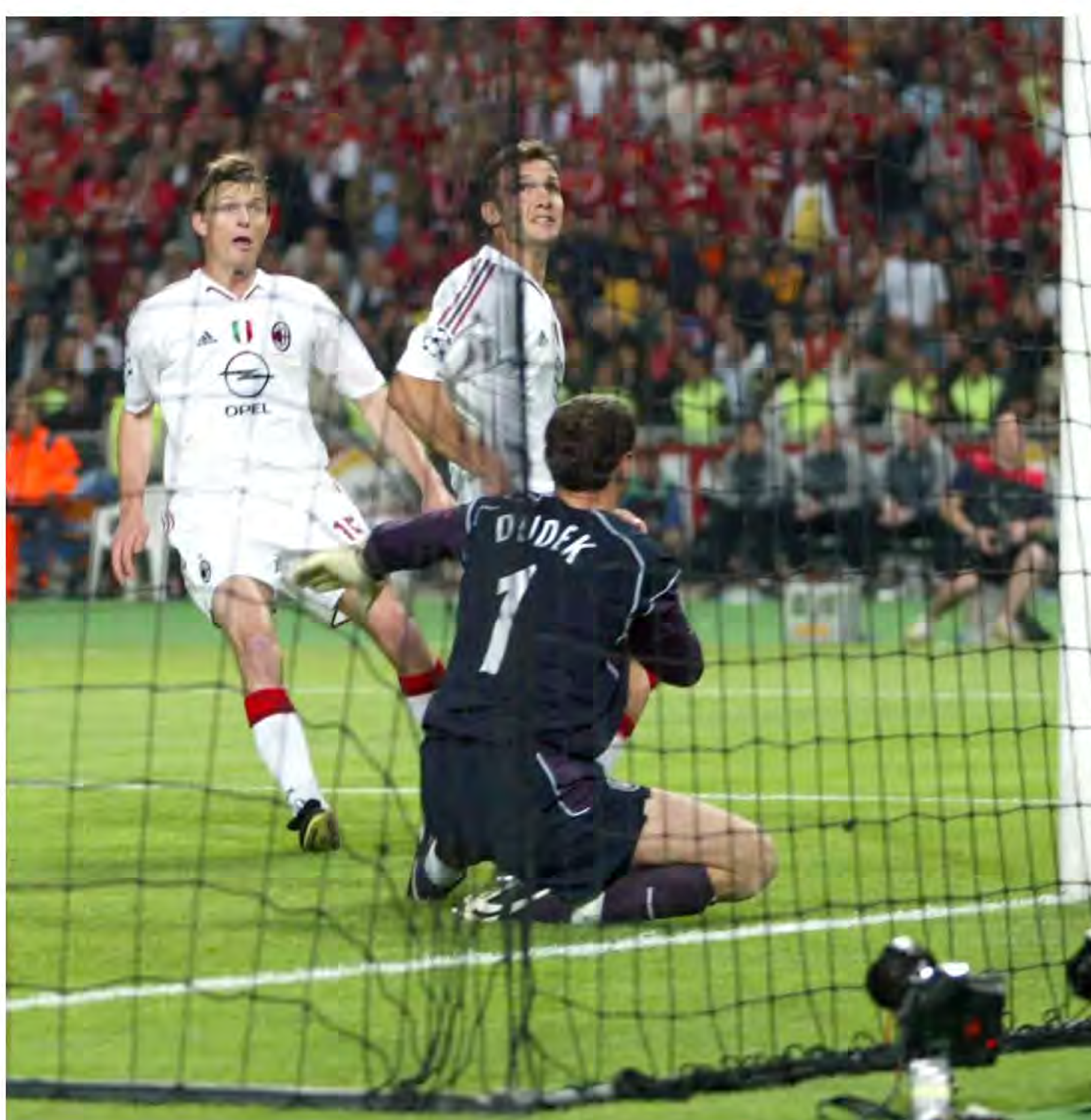
Milan's last penalty was from Shevchenko, and I waited until the very last moment to dive. As he got to the ball, I think he wanted to change his mind, which was a mistake. I saved it and spotted my team-mates sprinting towards me. I knew we'd won.

Back in the dressing room, everyone was celebrating. My mates from Poland were there – even Houllier, who said, "I need a photo with the cup – I built 80 per cent of this side!" Rafa was furious when he heard that. A ballroom in the hotel had been prepared and we partied until about 5 a.m. I ended up sleeping in a bed with my Polish international team-mate Jacek Krzynówek, who played for Leverkusen and scored against us in the last 16. All of my other friends were in the other bed!

When we got back to Liverpool, the victory parade was insane. Even Everton fans were waving flags. I recorded it all on my camera – I might watch it again soon. Later, I went back to Poland and the captain of the plane said, "Welcome on board our Champions League winner, Jerzy Dudek." I started crying – I was so moved. There was also a song released called 'Du the Dudek'. When I was in Kraków for an event with kids, some girls showed me the dance moves to it!

That summer, Rafa brought in Pepe Reina. Pepe was a great guy, but Rafa had signed a new goalkeeper at a moment when I felt like I was at the peak of my career. I told my agent to look for another club,







and to ask Liverpool to let me go. My inner anger led to a serious injury in training – I broke an elbow and was out for three months. When it got to November, the transfer window was approaching. I told Rafa that the World Cup was on the horizon and I needed to be playing football. Köln were interested, but a few days before the window closed, they called and said, "Why is Rafa not even talking to us?" I was surprised – I thought everything had been agreed.

The next day, I stormed up to him after training. He said, "They only offered a loan deal, and you're too important for us. They want to give us £800,000, but what if Reina gets an injury? I can't put £800,000 in a suitcase and put it between the goalposts." He'd promised he would help me leave – now he was admitting that he hadn't been willing to do that from day one. I was mad. All the other players were there and it became very tense.

Then I had this crazy thought – 'I think I'll just punch him in the face.' This evil whisper in my head was telling me that if I hit Rafa, they'd let me go to Köln. Finally, Rafa made a gesture. "Come into my office tomorrow and let's talk." A lot of my team-mates really thought I was going to punch him. Some of them wished I had – they laughed, saying, 'At least you could have choked him a bit...'

In the end I stayed and Rafa was partially right, because soon after the transfer window closed, Pepe got sent off at Chelsea and I played in a run of very important matches. I eventually joined Real Madrid in 2007, and all these years later I don't have bad feelings towards Rafa. I understand he was making decisions that were best for the club, but I was just disappointed he wasn't honest with me.

Looking back today, I appreciate even more that I played for a club with the history of Liverpool.

Last year, I went to Madrid with my son and watched Liverpool win the Champions League again, beating Tottenham. As a player, I never understood why supporters cried after big wins – but when I saw the players running around with the cup in their hands, I had tears in my eyes. I understood even more about the love I still get from Reds fans.

Back in November, I went to Anfield to watch Liverpool play Napoli. A fan walked over to me with his little son, pointed and said, "Do you know who this is? It's our hero, Jerzy Dudek!" People remember what happened in Istanbul wherever I go. I went to the Dominican Republic, and guests at the resort would come up to me and talk about it.

Even if 15 years have now passed, it still seems like last year to me. Liverpool had lifted many trophies before that night, but winning the Champions League in 2005 cemented the club's legacy even further. It made us immortal.

Clockwise from bottom left Dudek's remarkable extra-time double save from Shevchenko forced penalties; 'Never change your mind'; party time in Turkey; 'Fancy a photo, Gérard? Don't tell Rafa...'



LIVERPOOL LADIES FC

How this pioneering team overcame early setbacks to reach the heights of women's football

Words
Steve Wright

While the Liverpool Women's team has existed for a number of years, like their male counterparts, they were vastly different in their original incarnation to how they are today.

The club can trace their roots back to 1989, when they were given life under the moniker of Newton Ladies FC thanks in large part to the efforts of English international Liz Deighan (who would go on to manage the England women's under-21s side). While she initially wanted to maintain a background presence, she agreed to become manager when she saw the level of talent involved. Their rise was steady, finishing fourth and third in their first two seasons in the North West Regional League, with their first honours coming in the form of the Lancashire International Tournament in 1989 and the Red Star Southampton Tournament in 1990.

Deighan remained at the helm as Newton became founding members of the National Premier League in 1991, necessitating a name change to Knowsley United WFC. Again, they recorded a fourth-third combo in their first couple of seasons and lost out to Arsenal in the final of the 1993 National League Cup at Wembley. They reached the final of the FA Women's Cup the following year, this time losing out to Doncaster Belles.

In 1994, for the first time, the side became affiliated with the men's team, taking on the name of Liverpool Ladies FC. Having done everything themselves before then, they now had their kit, travel and hotels paid for. It was the start of a journey.

Even then, success wasn't instant. Despite finishing in second place behind Arsenal in 1994–95, the 1990s weren't anything to write home about, as the club rarely succeeded in rising above the mid-table positions.

A series of yo-yo years followed, with Liverpool being relegated to the Northern Premier in 2001. While they came back up after finishing top of the league in 2004, they swiftly dropped down again the following year. They bounced back once more in 2007, were relegated again in 2009, then gained promotion the following season.

By this time another league rebrand was on the cards, with the Women's Super League (WSL) taking the place of the Women's Premier League from 2010–11 onwards. Despite their mediocre









league placements, the club's history and catchment area worked in their favour, as Liverpool were invited to be founding members of the WSL alongside the previous season's winners and runners-up, Arsenal and Everton, as well as Birmingham, Bristol Academy, Chelsea, Doncaster Belles and Lincoln.

The new format didn't bring about a change in fortunes, however, as they finished bottom, recording just seven points all season. The following year didn't go much better – this time they only got five points. It was clear that a change was needed, and indeed it arrived.

First, in 2012, Matt Beard – previously an FA Cup winner with Chelsea – took over. The following year, Liverpool became the first club in the league to offer their players professional contracts. Previously, female footballers looking to make a serious living out of the game would have had to ply their trade in the North American leagues. Now, for the first time, there was a real prospect of being able to do the same in the UK.

Galvanised by new additions like USA defender Whitney Engen, England winger Gemma Davison, and Everton stars Natasha Dowie and Fara Williams, Liverpool were a team transformed, winning the newly incarnated league in two consecutive seasons and even qualifying for the Champions League for the first time.

However, their success didn't go unnoticed. Beard left in 2015 to take charge at Boston Breakers in the USA, with his assistant, Scott Rogers taking the reins at Liverpool. It was a while before they reached those heights again. Going through five managers in six years, coupled with a lack of investment that saw them struggle to keep pace with their rivals (being left to train elsewhere when the men's team left their old Melwood training ground to move to a new facility also rankled), their final league positions gradually plummeted before they were ultimately relegated to the Championship in 2020.


Clearly, things had to change – and change they did. In May 2021, Matt Beard returned. Buoyed by this, the team soared to the top of the table, clinching the Championship title and a return to the WSL.

While there is still work to be done, the future for Liverpool is bright. Playing their home games at Tranmere's Prenton Park and benefitting from a new training facility in the form of a redeveloped Melwood, they are now also permitted to use the club crest. As women's football continues to grow, so too do the Liverpool Ladies.

Top With the likes of Leanne Kiernan scoring for fun, the future's looking bright for Liverpool

Above right Matt Beard has overseen success over two different spells as manager

Above left Fara Williams was one of a number of players to sign when Liverpool turned professional



TOP 10 MANAGERS

Throughout its storied history Liverpool has been led by some of the game's most iconic figures, men who embraced the city and its people and gave their all for the club in the pursuit of glory

Words Rob Clark

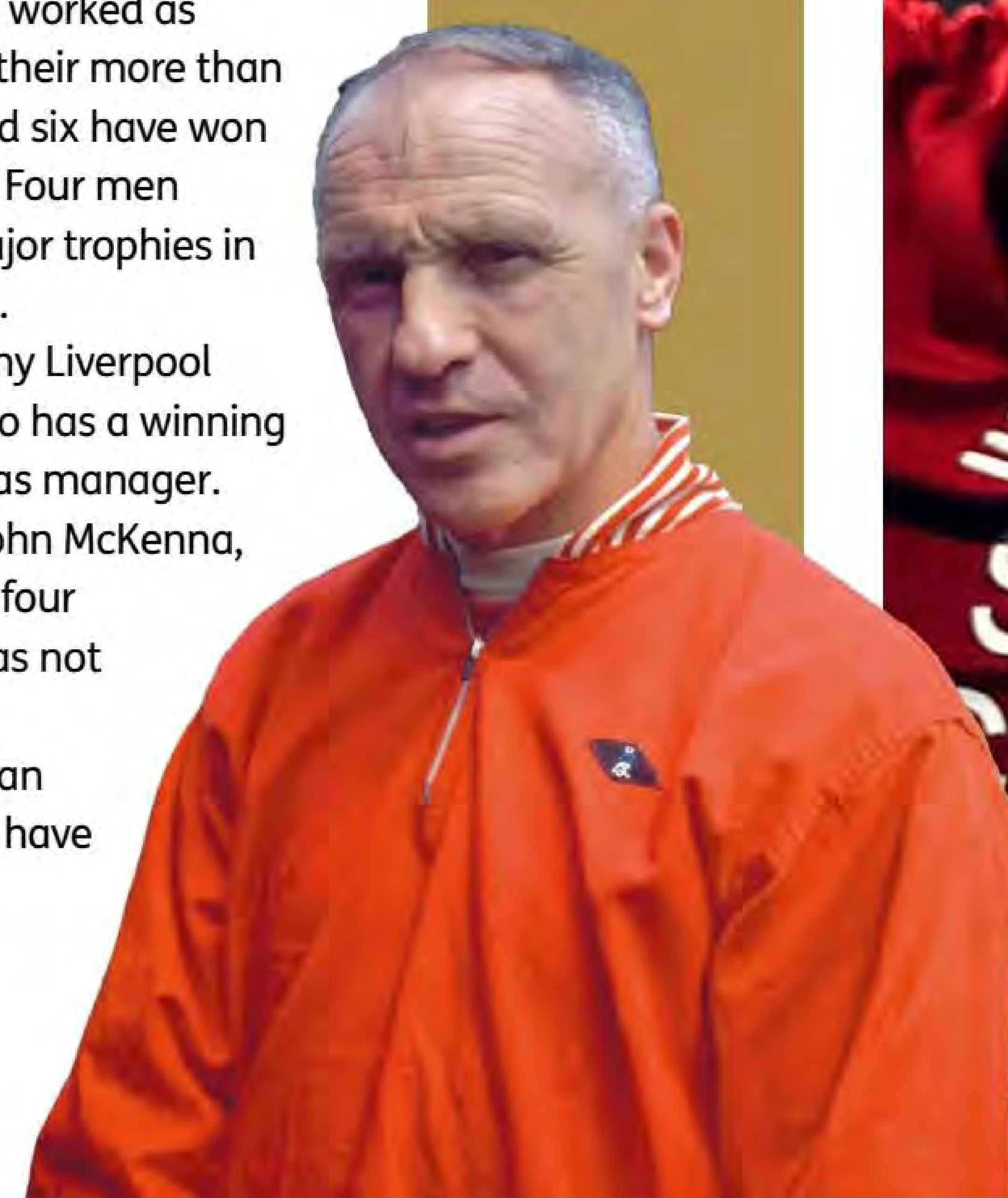
Liverpool have famously appointed managers from within whenever possible – the legendary Anfield Boot Room was more than just a meeting place, it was a set of principles, a way of life. It was only towards the end of the 20th century, after the relatively barren years under Graeme Souness and Roy Evans, that the club first looked abroad.

Frenchman Gérard Houllier was the first foreign manager, joining in July 1998 and taking sole charge in November of the same year. And even in the period since, Liverpool have had only two further foreign managers: Rafa Benítez and the charismatic Jürgen Klopp, who will leave at the end of the 2023–24 season after just under nine years in charge.

Including men who have shared the honour and those who worked as caretakers in the position, Liverpool have had 22 managers in their more than 130-year history. Of that 22, nine have won the league title and six have won the FA Cup and the League Cup (under all its different names). Four men have won the European Cup, and only one has won all four major trophies in the course of his career – the current incumbent, Jürgen Klopp.

Klopp also (as of March 2024) boasts the best win ratio of any Liverpool manager, at just over 61 per cent. The only other manager who has a winning percentage over 60 per cent is Kenny Dalglish, in his first stint as manager. (The first managers of the club, William Edward Barclay and John McKenna, who were in charge from the club's foundation and for its first four seasons, do have a 60.6 per cent win ratio, but most of that was not achieved in the top division.)

The debate over who the club's greatest manager is will be an ongoing debate, but what is in no doubt at all is that Liverpool have had some true giants of the game in the Anfield dugout.



Below Bill Shankly hailed from a footballing family; all four of his brothers played the game professionally

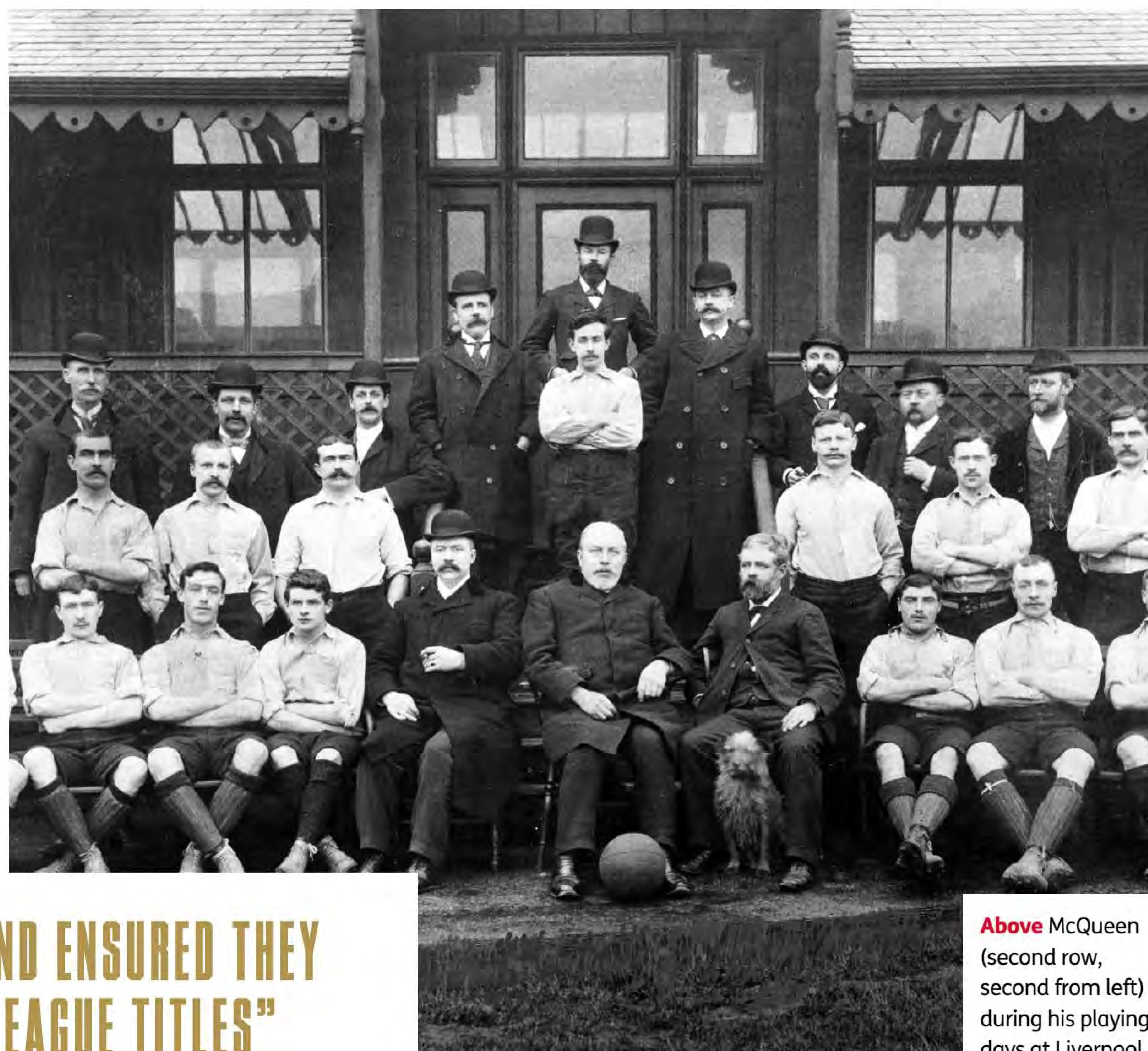


10 MATT MCQUEEN
1923–1928

Scotsman Matt McQueen had already been playing football for seven years in his own country before he and his brother, Hugh, were signed by new club Liverpool in 1892. He played in their first-ever league match, a 2-0 win over Middlesbrough Ironopolis, and went on to make 103 appearances for the club before retiring as a player in 1899.

McQueen became a Liverpool director in 1918 and five years later found himself temporary manager when David Ashworth left suddenly mid-season. The first former player to manage the club, McQueen ensured they stayed on the right path to seal back-to-back league titles.

Although already nearly 60 and in poor health after a car accident had led to him losing a leg, McQueen remained as manager for five years, taking charge for 229 games in total. Sadly, they were trophyless ones, though featuring solid enough league finishes of 12th, 4th, 7th and 9th. After finally retiring in 1928, McQueen continued to live near the ground and was a frequent visitor until his death in 1944.



Above McQueen (second row, second from left) during his playing days at Liverpool

"MCQUEEN STEPPED IN AND ENSURED THEY SEALED BACK-TO-BACK LEAGUE TITLES"

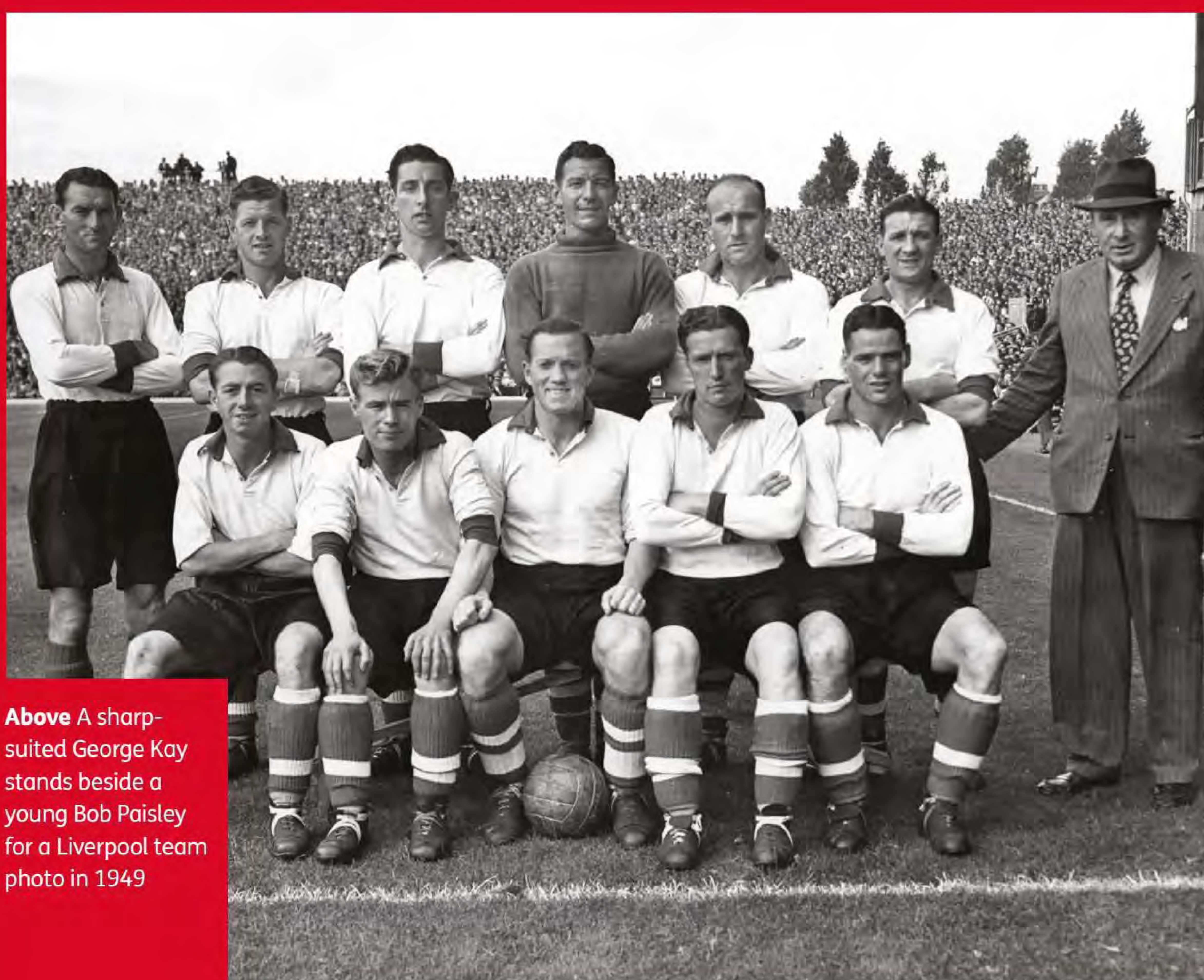
09 GEORGE KAY
1936–1951

Liverpool had seen the potential in George Kay (back row, far right) as an innovative manager and when, after five seasons, Southampton asked him to resign his position in order to reduce the wage bill at the struggling south-coast club, Kay and his trainer Bert Shelley were quickly snapped up.

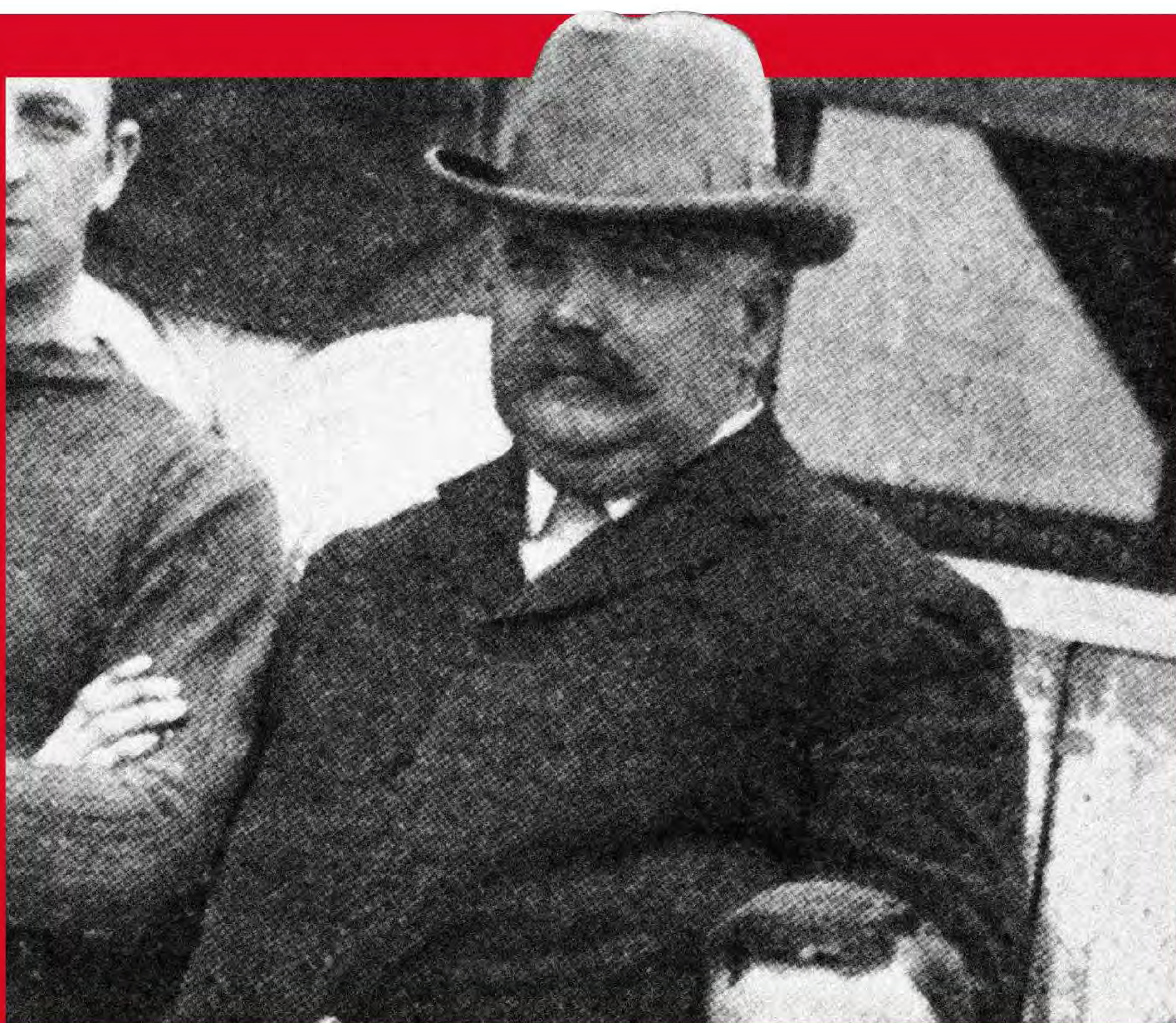
Incredibly he was to spend 15 years as Liverpool manager, although his time there was interrupted by World War II. Straight after the war, he displayed his original thinking by taking the club on a pre-season tour to North America, his reasoning being that both climate and diet (which was unaffected by rationing) would be better.

This unusual (at the time) idea meant that Liverpool players were fitter and better able to last a long and punishing season than other clubs. It paid off when Liverpool grew stronger as the season wore on and they clinched the first post-war championship in 1947 by beating Wolves 2-1 at Molineux to claim their fifth league title.

Kay was manager for a total of 354 games but never again scaled the heights of the 1946–47 season.



Above A sharp-suited George Kay stands beside a young Bob Paisley for a Liverpool team photo in 1949



08 TOM WATSON
1896–1915

Luring Tom Watson from Sunderland, where he had won the League title three times in four seasons, cost Liverpool £300 a year – a vast sum in those times. But for their money they got yet another forward-thinking manager, one unafraid to make changes when something wasn't working.

Watson was interested in the science of football, in particular the benefits of diet – he reduced players' intake of butter, sugar and milk – and exercise. His whole approach was highly 'professional' at a time when a lot of football wasn't much more than kicking a ball around in a park.

Liverpool were a bit of an up-and-down team in the seasons either side of the turn of the century, but in leading them to two league titles, in 1901 and 1906, Watson became the first man to manage two different clubs to the league crown.

Watson was Liverpool manager for 19 years, overseeing 742 games, and he remains the club's longest-serving manager. He was still only 56 when he died after a short illness, preventing him from undoubtedly extending his record further.



07 GÉRARD HOULLIER
1998–2004

The much-heralded Frenchman Gérard Houllier (left, with UEFA Cup, alongside Sami Hyypiä with the League Cup) had already guided little Lens into the top division of French football and future powerhouse Paris Saint-Germain to the Division 1 title before Liverpool came calling.

Initially the slightly odd plan was for Houllier and Roy Evans to jointly manage the team, but that arrangement, unsurprisingly, did not work out. Evans, ever the Anfield Boot Room man, offered his resignation to enable Houllier a free run at installing his players and methods.

Houllier embarked on a five-year rebuild, during which time he brought in Sami Hyypiä, Dietmar Hamann, Vladimír Šmicer, Emile Heskey and Gary McAllister, among others. He also introduced academy players Michael Owen, Jamie Carragher and Steven Gerrard. It culminated in an incredible hat-trick of cups in the 2000–01 season.

First came a penalty shootout League Cup win over First Division Birmingham City, then a 2-1 FA Cup victory against Arsenal courtesy of two late goals from Owen. Four days later, on 16 May, Liverpool completed the hat-trick with a 5-4 extra-time win over Alavés in the UEFA Cup.

Thereafter, Houllier seemed to lose his touch with signings, and though he did win the League Cup again in 2003, fans lost patience. He left on 24 May 2004, but his cup heroics still earn him a place in our top 10.

Above
Prior to joining Liverpool, Watson helped Newcastle West End to get a lease at St James' Park

Left
While studying a degree in English, Houllier spent a year in Liverpool working as an assistant at a secondary school in Walton



06 JOE FAGAN
1983–1985

Another of the fabled Anfield Boot Room, Joe Fagan is mostly remembered by those who played for him, and by his fellow coaches, as being a real people person. While happy to berate his players on the odd occasion, much more often he would be found putting an arm around them and offering words of encouragement.

Fagan epitomised the idea of Liverpool being all in it together. And when he took over from Bob Paisley in 1983, he set an astonishing record of winning three trophies in his first season as manager.

It was a dour campaign that saw Liverpool grinding it out in the league, winning a League Cup final replay 1-0 against Everton (after a 0-0 extra-time draw in the first meeting) and triumphing 4-2 on penalties against Roma in the European Cup final (after a 1-1 draw). No one cared. One of the nicest men in football, who had faithfully served other, greater managers, had his just rewards for all those years at the club.

"FAGAN EPITOMISED THE IDEA OF LIVERPOOL BEING ALL IN IT TOGETHER"





05 RAFA BENÍTEZ
2004–2010

On 16 June 2004, Rafael Benítez became the first Spaniard appointed to manage a Premier League club after the dismissal of Houllier. Benítez had a solid background having spent nine years working behind the scenes at Real Madrid and then managing Valencia to their first La Liga title for 31 years in 2002.

At Valencia, Benítez had introduced a more attacking style than fans were used to, and he tried to do the same at Anfield. He wasn't always successful in that, but the fans loved him for it, particularly as he brought in Luis García and Xabi Alonso, who both became firm fan favourites.

Ultimately, Benítez is remembered fondly for two main reasons. The first was masterminding the Miracle of Istanbul, when he was calmness personified in the dressing room at half-time with his team 3-0 down. The second was for openly opposing hated new owners George Gillett and Tom Hicks from 2006 onwards. Rafa made it clear he didn't feel personally supported and was disappointed in the lack of transfer activity.

Maybe the pressure Benítez applied led to the club splashing around £20 million on Fernando Torres in July 2007. The Spaniard proceeded to score a faintly ridiculous 65 goals in 102 matches for the club. Less high-profile signings such as Ryan Babel and Yossi Benayoun also played important parts in the next couple of campaigns.

Many fans have a soft spot for Benítez, a man who wore his heart on his sleeve and seemed genuinely honoured to be Liverpool's manager.

04 KENNY DALGLISH
1985–1991, 2011–2012

Unable to deal with the aftermath of the Heysel Stadium disaster in 1985, Joe Fagan resigned as manager and Kenny Dalglish found himself in the hot seat as player-manager. No cause for concern. Calmly building on the solid foundations set in place by Fagan, Dalglish led the Reds to their first-ever league and cup double in his very first season in charge.

It was further sweetened for fans because both came at the expense of city rivals Everton: two points separated them in the league, while a 3-1 win at Wembley rubbed salt into the wound.

Not surprisingly after that start, Dalglish found himself in situ for a further five years. He added two more league titles and another FA Cup, further cementing himself as one of the club's all-time greats.

Just as importantly, Dalglish was responsible for the arrival of the attacking trio of John Barnes, Peter Beardsley and John Aldridge (originally signed to replace Ian Rush but soon more often playing alongside him). Midfielder Ray Houghton also joined and made a major impact.

Despite his success, Dalglish was haunted by the Hillsborough tragedy and found it hard to cope with. On 22 February 1991, he decided he needed to take a break and resigned with immediate affect.





Right Dalglish jumps for joy during the 1989–90 season, a campaign that saw his side score some thumping victories, including a 9-0 win over Crystal Palace **Left** Celebrating the Division One title with Ronnie Moran (left) and Roy Evans

03 JÜRGEN KLOPP
2015–2024

In his seven seasons at Borussia Dortmund Jürgen Klopp had proved himself to be one of the world's best managers, taking on the traditional powers in German football and landing a Bundesliga title followed by a league and cup double (the club's first).

Appointed Liverpool manager on 8 October 2015, he swiftly brought his 'gegenpressing' style to the Reds, which entails trying to win the ball back the second you lose it rather than fall back and regroup. To work efficiently, the players in such a system must be quick, alert and organised in order to win the ball high up the pitch.

Klopp is hugely charismatic and a fantastic motivator. He has repeatedly spoken about how "the best football is always about expression of emotion."

His emotional reactions on the touchline have occasionally got Klopp into trouble, but Liverpool fans haven't cared about that as he continued to win trophies. As of March 2024, his Liverpool teams have won a Champions League, a Premier League title, an FA Cup and two League Cups.

Klopp recently announced that he would be leaving Liverpool – and taking a break from football to re-charge – at the end of the 2023–24 season. Plenty of time for a couple more trophies first.



Left Klopp cut his teeth in Germany with Mainz 05 and then Dortmund

02 BOB PAISLEY

1974–1983

The first beneficiary of the Anfield Boot Room system, Bob Paisley took over from his mentor and boss, Bill Shankly, after the latter had resigned in the summer of 1974.

Paisley built on the superb legacy that had been handed to him and won six league titles as manager, plus three European Cups, three League Cups and, on one of the few occasions Liverpool did not compete in Europe's premier competition, he won the UEFA Cup instead. If Shankly was the motivator, the people person, Paisley was the tactician; happy to be plotting in the background while Shankly took centre-stage. Paisley was therefore initially reluctant to take on the role of number one, but as he was a Liverpool man through and through – once declaring that he would "go and sweep the street and be proud to do it for Liverpool FC if they asked me to" – he felt he simply couldn't refuse.

Paisley officially took the helm on 26 July 1974, some 35 years after first joining the club as a player. One of his chief virtues, built during his already substantial playing and coaching career, was his ability to spot players who were not just very talented but who would fit into his tactical vision for the team and how they should play. Kenny Dalglish, Alan Hansen, Graeme Souness, Ian Rush, Alan Kennedy, Mark Lawrenson and Ronnie Whelan all signed for the club during his nine years in charge. Each was to prove a major figure in Liverpool's history.

As detailed elsewhere, Paisley also reigned over the period in which Liverpool's dominance stretched into Europe. He became the first (and for a long time only) man to manage three European Cup-winning sides – before Carlo Ancelotti and Zinedine Zidane matched his achievement in 2014 and 2018 respectively.

Paisley retired in 1983 and was made an OBE the same year. He continued to serve as a director of the club for a further nine years until ill health prevented him from taking an active role. Including the Charity Shield, Paisley won a staggering 20 trophies during his time as manager.



"PAISLEY BUILT ON THE SUPERB LEGACY THAT HAD BEEN HANDED TO HIM BY BILL SHANKLY"



Main The no-nonsense legend passed away in 1996 at the age of 77 **Left** Hands resting on two of the 16 bottles of Bell's whisky that represented his Manager of the Month awards, Paisley shows off his 1980–81 haul

01 BILL SHANKLY

1959–1974

The legendary Bill Shankly arrived at Liverpool in December 1959, an inauspicious time as the club had spent the past five seasons in the Second Division and in January of that year had lost in the FA Cup Third Round at non-league Worcester City. Anfield was looking in a state of disrepair and the training ground at Melwood needed improving and updating. The same could largely be said of the squad.

But one aspect Shankly was very happy with was the coaching team, and he wasted no time in telling them so. Bob Paisley, Joe Fagan and Reuben Bennett were all assured their positions were safe and they quickly got down to planning for the future.

Shankly placed 24 players on the transfer list and within a year all 24 were gone. For those who remained, and those who arrived – which included Scotland international players Ron Yeats and Ian St John – it was Shankly's innovative training programme that really made a difference.

In the days when a lot of clubs relied on road running to build fitness, Shankly preferred training to be on grass, with a ball, and competitive five-a-side games were a frequent occurrence. One specific exercise was to set up boards and then use them to play off, turning from one board to another; it formed the basis of Liverpool's 'pass and move' philosophy.

Another innovation was the warm down. Way before their time, both Shankly and Paisley were adamant that cooling down through gentler exercise and then rest before showering or eating was the right way forward.



"BETTER WAS TO FOLLOW, BUT NONE OF IT WOULD'VE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT SHANKLY"





Above Joining in on a practice session at Melwood, 1971 **Right** Leading his charges out at the 1971 FA Cup final **Left** Waving at the crowd during the open-top bus parade held to celebrate Liverpool's 1974 FA Cup win

Shankly was totally committed to the concept of the fans being a team's 12th man. A great speaker, he always managed to say the right thing in praising the club's loyal supporters. As a result they adored him and formed an unbreakable bond with the club that is still evident today.

Shankly won three league titles, two FA Cups and a UEFA Cup, but arguably it was his revolutionary approach that is his greatest legacy. The glorious years that followed could never have happened without him.

HOW TRENT REVOLUTIONISED THE FULL-BACK

FROM THE FourFourTwo ARCHIVES

Trent Alexander-Arnold has smashed Premier League assist records and made it sexy to be a right-back – and he's only 21. But how? *FFT* asks the experts for their theories of evolution

Words Andrew Murray

Hands up if you grew up wanting to be a full-back. Us neither. A goal-hungry forward? Definitely. A chalk-on-your-boots winger, tying defenders in knots? Sounds like fun. Even a centre-back who sweats blood and spinal fluid for the cause? It's part of English football's warrior DNA.

But full-back? That's for the Sunday League clogger who turns up every week despite being severely deficient in basic co-ordination, let alone footballing ability. At professional level, too, there has always been an element of the unfashionable to full-backs – particularly the doughty types who wouldn't venture past the halfway line even if repeatedly urged by a cattle prod.

Jamie Carragher outlined the prevailing feeling on *Monday Night Football* a couple of years ago. "No one wants to be a Gary Neville," said the former Liverpool centre-back to his Sky Sports colleague. That it touched enough of a nerve to elicit the curt reply, "Phil did", the ex-Manchester United skipper referring to his younger brother, only proved the position's status of ugly duckling.

Over the last 18 months, however, revolution has been afoot. Since the beginning of the 2018–19 season, no Premier League player has registered more assists than Trent Alexander-Arnold. In fact, one of the few players to be anywhere near him is his Liverpool partner in crime at full-back, Andy Robertson.

But what Alexander-Arnold is doing is different. He is a shaper of games and arguably the Reds' most creative player, as his one-goal, two-assist display in the 4-0 shellacking of Leicester City on Boxing Day aptly demonstrated. This is the story of how Liverpool – gegenpressing their way to, in all likelihood, the widest Premier League-winning margin ever – and Trent Alexander-Arnold made the full-back cool.

"This isn't new, you know," Mark Lawrenson tells *FourFourTwo*. The former Reds defender then traces back the lineage of attacking full-backs: Cafu, Hamburg's legendary Manfred Kaltz in the 1970s and '80s, back to Giacinto Facchetti for 1960s' Inter, Brazil's Djalma Santos and England's own Jimmy Armfield in the 1950s.

"What Trent has done is take it to a new level," says Lawrenson. "It's his mobility; his passing ability; his pace. His service from wide areas is fabulous. He gets his head up to have a look, and if on the odd occasion he doesn't have time to do that, he'll deliver right into the corridor of uncertainty."

In an era where footballers are adapting to the specific demands dictated by each position, the resurgence of the defensive midfielder – to the near-extinction of the all-action box-to-box midfielder – has established a backbone affording both full-backs greater licence to attack with impunity.

"Back in the day, you defended against the winger because both teams matched up with 4-4-2," former Manchester City and Everton left-back Andy Hinchcliffe said recently. Last year, Alexander-Arnold broke Hinchcliffe's Premier League record of 11 assists in a season for a full-back (Robertson matched it). "In the late '80s," Hinchcliffe added, "I had the energy and intention to overlap and get up and down the pitch, but that was your only attacking option."

In Jürgen Klopp's 4-3-3 system, Mohamed Salah and Sadio Mané play as inverted wingers and occupy half-spaces in between central areas and the flanks, allowing Alexander-Arnold and Robertson the freedom to go forward. The manager's 4-3-3 in defence essentially becomes a 3-2-5 in attack, as defensive midfielder Fabinho drops into a back three and the full-backs provide outlets in a highly fluid, mobile front five.

"It's a big help if you have a left-footed winger who wants to come inside, because you can then provide width on the outside of them," Alexander-Arnold told *FFT* in 2018. "I've always thought of myself as an attacking full-back and I want to express myself by joining in attacks. Mo definitely gives me the chance to do that."

The young defender has certainly taken advantage, contributing no fewer than 22 Premier League assists between the beginning of the 2018–19 season and the end of January 2020. The variation in his delivery is staggering, ranging from arcing crosses from deep

(which are so good they don't require a 6ft 4in battering ram to attack) to delicate back-post dinks, which have already created two goals for Roberto Firmino in this campaign.

"He has developed this whipped delivery which is really difficult to defend," enthuses Lawrenson. "When Liverpool's centre-backs have the ball, both full-backs have their feet on the touchline, so it's very hard for three opposition forwards against four defenders who are all very comfortable on the ball."

Timing is everything. "He's got that element of surprise to his attacks," Joan Capdevila, Spain's 2010 World Cup-winning left-back, tells *FFT*. "He chooses the perfect moment. Not just any footballer has that innate sense. If you've got a team that's constantly on the attack, like Liverpool, then it looks like Alexander-Arnold is too, but he is much cleverer than that. He takes risks and loses the ball quite a lot, whether with crosses into the box or long diagonal balls, but that doesn't matter because the disorganisation it creates causes havoc."

Capdevila's point about risk and reward is supported by statistics. This season, no outfield player has conceded possession more than Alexander-Arnold, and nor has anyone put in as many unsuccessful crosses, while only Tottenham's Toby Alderweireld has attempted a greater number of unsuccessful long passes.

That last statistic proves particularly instructive. The vast majority of Alexander-Arnold's uncompleted long passes are diagonals from full-back to full-back, which immediately change the point of attack. Think back to Liverpool's 3-1 home win against Manchester City last November, and it was the 21-year-old whose 60-yard swinging pass to Robertson started the move from which Salah headed the Reds' second goal. If Alexander-Arnold didn't take the risk, that goal would have been impossible.

His best performance came at Leicester over Christmas: one goal, two assists, 105 touches (more than anyone else in the game) and 60 passes, the majority of them made inside the Foxes' half. True, Leicester's tactics played into his hands – as a nominal left-winger, James Maddison had neither the will to retreat with the right-back nor the desire to hold his width the few times his side had the ball – but Alexander-Arnold dictated the game: a playmaker in defence. "That game just isn't normal for a full-back," continues Capdevila.

One reason Alexander-Arnold's upward trajectory is so steep – he skipped the Under-23s and jumped straight from Liverpool's U18s to the first team – is his capacity to listen and learn. Klopp calls him "one of the most relentless professionals I've met when it comes to focusing on getting better each and every day", and the Scouser's set-piece delivery is the perfect metaphor.

In early 2018, coaches saw that, despite his stellar delivery from open play, there was a technical fault with the dead ball. His run-up wasn't consistent and repeatable. Using former rugby player Jonny Wilkinson as inspiration, he worked tirelessly to correct the chink.

"Trent practises every day, staying behind after training – and not just for a few minutes," says Lawrenson. "We are talking hours."



Now, thanks to a remodelled action, Alexander-Arnold has made the most goals from set-pieces in Europe's top five leagues this season. However, his most famous assist came last season. In April's Champions League semi-final second leg, with Liverpool back level on aggregate after a 3-0 battering in Barcelona, he spotted Divock Origi all alone in the penalty area as Barça's defenders chatted among themselves. Alexander-Arnold delivered instantly in a moment of unique improvisation.

"It comes down to making a quick decision and having the skill to execute it," reveals Capdevila. "Something like that will happen only once, so to have the confidence to make that choice in a Champions League semi-final is the most impressive thing."

For three months in 2014, though, Alexander-Arnold hated football. The youngster was about to turn 17 that October, and in the off-season he had sat down with Liverpool academy director Alex Inglethorpe and U18s head coach Neil Critchley. They decided that his most obvious pathway into the first team was as an explosive full-back.



"A CAPACITY TO LISTEN AND LEARN IS ONE REASON WHY HE WENT STRAIGHT FROM THE U18s INTO THE FIRST TEAM"

Alexander-Arnold, part of the club since he was six, had played in the academy as a winger, a defensive midfielder and occasionally even a centre-back. He was quick, had great delivery and a drive to improve that separated him from his peers, but Inglethorpe and Critchley knew that the teenager had to work on his temperament.

Too often in matches, Trent would lose his head. He would let his shoulders slump, kick balls away in frustration, yell at team-mates and allow his emotions to take over and dictate performance. Every day for three months, Inglethorpe and Critchley crucified him on the training pitch.

"He's gone," they shouted. They kept fizzing the ball over to winger Bobby Adekanye – the U18s' most skilful attacker – and he ran at Alexander-Arnold for hours each day. "Trent's quit. Give Bobby the ball. Get at Trent, get at him."

Alexander-Arnold would arrive every day knowing what to expect. It was, he has since admitted, "absolutely horrible – I hated it". He thought he wasn't good enough to cope, yet the mental resolve it gave him was vital to his development. Inglethorpe later explained, "If he didn't like my voice for a while, then multiply that by 60,000 Liverpool fans at a game, and another couple of million watching on TV who are going to be really honest on social media."

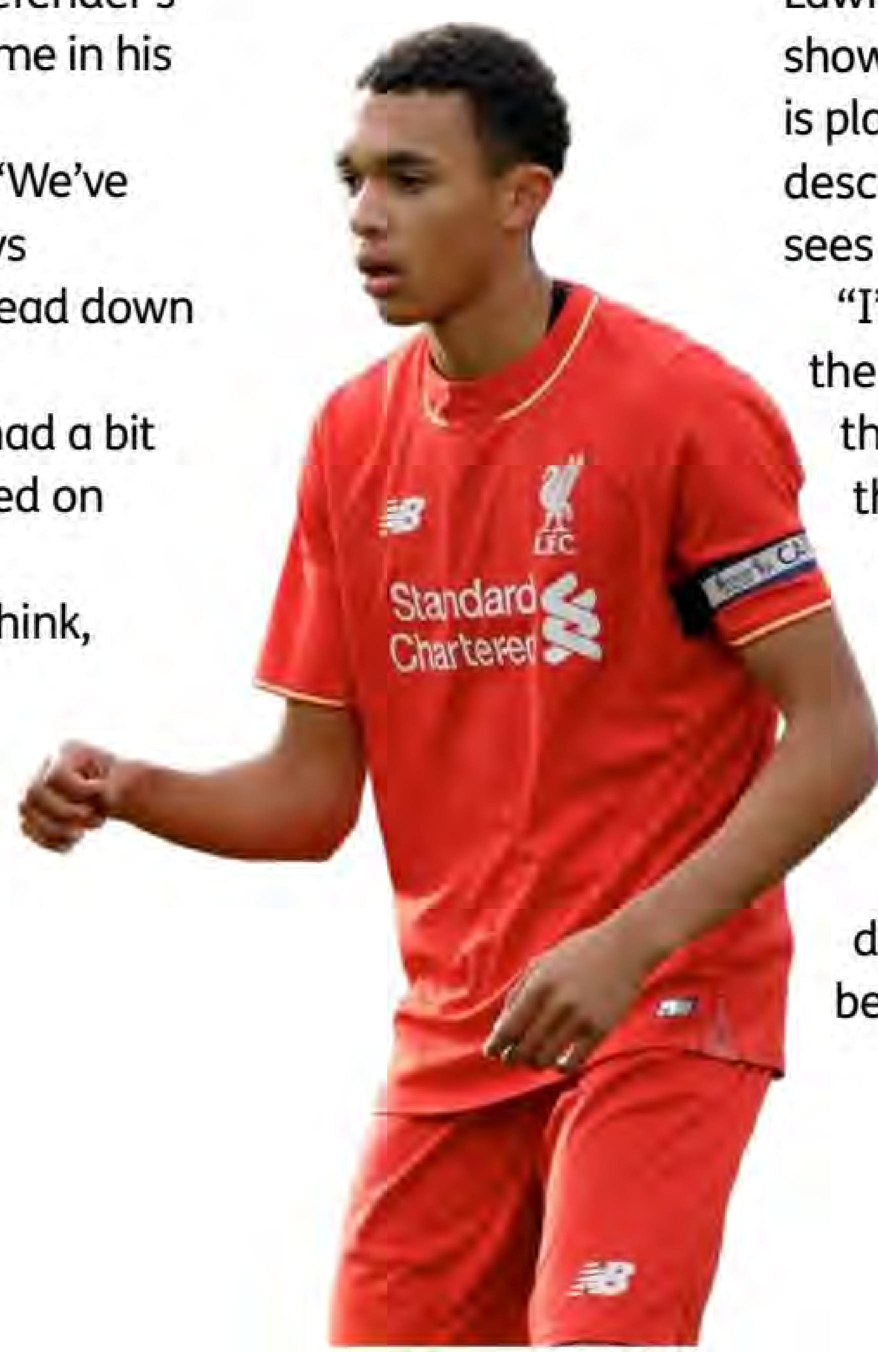
It didn't take long for tongues to start wagging – the defender's hero, Steven Gerrard, even mentioned 'Trent Arnold' by name in his 2015 autobiography.

"Trent was always the first name on the coaches' lips – 'We've got this right-back and he's going to be some player'," says Lawrenson. "It wasn't just ability, but the way he got his head down and worked hard, and the way he lived his life.

"Any test, basically, he has managed to overcome. He had a bit of a wobble, but his mental strength is huge. That is worked on from an early age in the academy.

"When you move back from midfield to full-back, you think, 'Crikey, I've got so much space to play. I must have leprosy, because no one's come anywhere near me'. Your game intelligence becomes so much higher as you know what the person in those other positions has to cope with, so you know when to make a pass or a forward run."

Far left Inspired at Leicester last December **Left** "He's the Scouser in our team," sing fans **Above** Would this have happened without his moment of brilliance in the semi against Barça? **Below** The Reds' training ground has doubled as a school of hard knocks for Alexander-Arnold



Even Liverpool's backroom staff are staggered at the progress he made in defending half-spaces on the front foot – the areas of the pitch between the widest and most central channels that opposition creators like to exploit. He reads the game superbly, something perhaps linked to his love of chess – in October 2018, Alexander-Arnold even took on world champion Magnus Carlsen and lost in eight more moves than Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates once managed.

Fitness work, meanwhile, is specific to the demands of Alexander-Arnold's personal interpretation of a full-back. High-intensity sprint training has now become the norm.

"It's no use just being able to run at the same pace and get around a pitch like a midfielder might have done ten years ago – it has to be more precise," Capdevila says of the position's modern training demands.

"Full-backs are pure athletes, almost 1,500-metre runners now, and they have to be the fittest in the team. He's the perfect player for this Liverpool side: young, quick and fundamental for the champions-elect. He has the chance to define an era with his team."

The effect Alexander-Arnold is having on this most underrated of positions is only just beginning to be felt.

"There is always a generational time lag," Luke Thomson, a UEFA B Licence coach in the Southern Amateur League, explains to *FFT*. "Young kids watch the emergence of Trent Alexander-Arnold and want to emulate him. In our team, playing at full-back isn't viewed as something especially positive, particularly among classic wingers who could actually play quite well there. We've tried to discourage that this season by playing a diamond in midfield, which allows our full-backs to be the main outlet.

"Kids who can develop those in-between techniques are now at an advantage. Having the transferable skills is massively important for their long-term progression."

There is a school of thought that, such is his success at right-back, Liverpool's No.66 might revert to his original midfield berth one day. Mark Lawrenson doesn't agree.

"They've engineered a way of giving him space, meaning he has so much room to move into at pace – and once he's got half a yard, you're never going to catch him – so why would you change?" asks Lawrenson. "The fans sing, 'He's the Scouser in our team'. You can show local lads Trent and say, 'This kid has come from nowhere and is playing every week'. He's making this position cool. That's the best description I've heard." The man himself agrees. Alexander-Arnold sees his future as lying exactly where it is now.

"I'm a right-back, and I hope me and Robbo can help change the idea that no kids want to grow up to be a full-back," he said at the turn of the year, referencing the yearly assists competition that rages between Robertson and himself. "Obviously there was the famous saying, 'No one wants to grow up to be a Gary Neville'."

The 21-year-old knew who coined that particular phrase and delivered it with a knowing smile. Soon, though, everyone will grow up wanting to be Trent Alexander-Arnold, to become a marauding menace to opposition defences. All you have to do is revolutionise your position and become utterly synonymous with it. Good luck with that.

"AM I THE BEST PLAYER IN THE WORLD? IN MY MIND, YES"

Mohamed Salah has become a Liverpool legend in less than five years at Anfield – but he'll never tell you his appetite is sated. With more trophies to be won and personal accolades to aim for, the Ballon d'Or hopeful exclusively tells *FourFourTwo* why he's not satisfied just yet, and why remaining on Merseyside is in his heart

Words Chris Flanagan **Portraits** Nick Eagle

FROM THE
FourFourTwo
ARCHIVES





"I hope he's got his slippers on..." Maybe greatness always starts with an enquiry about slip-ons – because it's certainly how it all began for Mohamed Salah. The Egyptian was spending his very first morning at Liverpool in the summer of 2017, and he had to be dressed for the occasion. No slippers, no deal – at least if the waiting nurse had anything to do with it, her assertion couched with an authoritative tone that suggested this may not have been the first footballer's medical she'd ever overseen. Perhaps all who aim for legendary status at Anfield must first don the comfortable footwear and win her seal of approval.

Thankfully, she was never going to get any trouble from Salah. Liverpool's new signing emerged from behind a door giggling like a schoolboy, ready for his MRI scan, wearing a pair of natty white slippers – the sort of freebies you get at a posh hotel spa – and a fetching hospital gown. "Oh, you look nice!" laughed the nurse. "You can't take them home, though..." Spoilsport.

"I EXPECT GREAT THINGS OF MYSELF. I THINK POSITIVELY EVEN IF I DON'T ACHIEVE IT"

The video of this exchange still remains on Liverpool's YouTube channel, charting the No.11's first day as a Red, and seems ever more surreal in the context of the five years that have followed – five years that have turned Salah into one of the greatest players in the history of an already fabled club.

The nurse probably had no idea quite how significant the chuckling footballer stood in front of her was about to become – and she wouldn't have been the only one. "I come back to this video every year," a Liverpool fan wrote online recently. "None of us knew that this was the day we signed the best player in the world."

That summer, ten players joined Premier League clubs for a fee of £40 million or more. Salah wasn't one of them. Manchester United splashed out £75 million on Romelu Lukaku. Manchester City signed Benjamin Mendy, Kyle Walker and Bernardo Silva. Chelsea recruited Álvaro Morata and Tiémoué Bakayoko (plus a £35-million Danny Drinkwater). Alexandre Lacazette moved to Arsenal. Elsewhere, Neymar switched to PSG for £198 million. Barcelona then shelled out £97 million for Ousmane Dembélé.

Liverpool paid a rather more reasonable £36.9 million to lure Salah from Roma, and it bought them a man who would completely change the club's modern history. Now, that man is sat in front of *FourFourTwo*. He smiles as he thinks back to that day when he walked into the city, patted the 'This Is Anfield' sign for good luck and officially became a Liverpool player.

The grin is because he knew exactly what was going to happen next, even if few others did. "I had a conversation with my friends the other day," Salah tells us now. "I said, 'Do you remember what I told you when I came – that we're going to win the league and the Champions League?' They laughed when I said that, because they'd supported Liverpool for a very long time. They told me, 'Everybody comes and says the same'.

"But I always expect great things from myself. Even if you don't achieve it, I always think positively. When I arrived, I wanted to win the Premier League and I wanted to win the Champions League. I wanted to do something great for this club. In the past few years, I think we did something really good."

That's a pretty accurate assessment of his first five campaigns on Merseyside as the undoubted star of Liverpool's first side since the 1980s to claim both domestic and European glory. Kenny Dalglish, Ian Rush, Mo Salah – his name belongs in that sort of company now, and it doesn't end there. Move over, Lionel Messi: the Egyptian in the gown and slippers may well have become the finest footballer on Planet Earth.

A DINK OF BEAUTY

Ask Salah to choose his favourite Liverpool goals, and he doesn't pick the ones you might immediately expect.

He's already bagged 153 of them in just 240 appearances by the time he sits down to chat with *FFT* at his home, just hours after starting for Jürgen Klopp's side in a lunchtime fixture against Watford at Anfield. The Reds won 2-0 and he's arrived back to his family in a decidedly good mood, even though Manchester City return to the table's summit thanks to victory at Burnley shortly before our interview begins.

In January, though, Liverpool had been as many as 14 points behind the rampant Sky Blues, a seemingly insurmountable obstacle.



Below "I can't wait to start playing with Grujic and Klavan"



"We're doing well," he says. "Hopefully we are going to finish the season with the title."

Salah apologises as he briefly breaks off to ask his seven-year-old daughter, the elder of his two children, to be a little quieter in the background, so he can speak to us without distractions. "Makka, please!" he says. "Sorry, two kids, big problem!" It's a joke, of course – it's obvious he adores them.

He quickly turns back to our question, about the goals that mean most to him in the red of Liverpool. Asked for his three standouts, he doesn't have an immediate answer. "Three?" he replies, with a tone that suggests he doesn't even know where to begin, the choice is so vast. What about one, then: is that easier to pinpoint? "One?! One is tough!" he says, breaking out into laughter. You get a sense that picking one of 153 is like choosing between his two daughters.

He thinks, though, and offers the two that come to mind. Maybe some might have anticipated that he'd immediately choose the goal that won him FIFA's prestigious Puskas Award in 2018, a twist and a turn on the edge of the box at home to Everton followed by a majestic curling effort into the far corner. Then there was the long-range thunderbolt he scored against Chelsea, as Liverpool battled Manchester City in the closing stages of the Premier League title race in 2019. Or his mesmerising solo run against City at Anfield in October, when he befuddled an array of top-quality defenders in a way that only Salah can, earning him his sixth BBC Goal of the Month award – only Wayne Rooney has ever won more.

His answer, though, is none of the above. "Maybe Man City away in the Champions League – the way I scored was really good," he says. "Then United at home [in January 2020], for sure. I can't choose one!"

We'll come back to the United goal a little later, but his first pick is instructive – particularly in choosing it over his 2021 strike against the same opposition, seen by many as far more spectacular. "That one was good, it wasn't bad..." Salah smiles modestly. "But with the one in the Champions League, it was the way that I shot."

Salah had dribbled the ball past Ederson at the Etihad Stadium in April 2018, but he was moving away from goal and the angle was tight. Nicolás Otamendi was standing in his way, before an exquisitely subtle dink floated the ball over the Argentine and into the net, almost in slow motion. It was just one kick of the ball, from no more than ten yards out, but this was a piece of art, usually delivered with a paint brush in-hand rather than a left foot.

"No one expected I was going to shoot with someone on the line," says the footballing Picasso. "In my mind, there was more joy for a goal like that."

Not least because it was right in front of the Liverpool faithful, and he'd effectively secured a place in their first Champions League semi-final for a decade – it was a crucial away goal that sent them into a 4-1 aggregate lead, against a team that would accrue a record 100 Premier League points that season. If his popularity among Reds fans was already soaring towards the end of a stellar first season at Anfield, then this was the goal that cemented the bond and began to create a bona fide club legend who proved he was capable of delivering in the very biggest of matches.

In Klopp's first two seasons as Liverpool boss, the Reds had made clear progress but finished eighth and fourth in the Premier League, also losing in the League Cup and Europa League finals. With Salah in their team, absolutely anything had become possible – the player himself knew that, too. From the moment he arrived, he always did.

"When I had the conversation with the manager and he showed me the plan for the club, I was so excited by it," he remembers. "I said, 'Yeah, I think we have a team to win something.' From the beginning, I thought we could do something special."

That they reached the Champions League final in his debut campaign, despite losing Philippe Coutinho to Barcelona in January, said much about Salah's significant impact. His talent wasn't exactly a secret when he joined Liverpool – he'd scored 35 Serie A goals in two and a half seasons at Fiorentina and then Roma, not an inconsiderable sum against Italian defences – and the £36.9-million price tag was actually a club record, despite being lower than many fees paid by other teams that summer. But so much of the media focus initially remained on Coutinho and whether the Reds could hang on to the player many regarded as their biggest asset.

As it turned out, Liverpool didn't miss the Brazilian at all. Salah was named PFA Player of the Year, scoring an extraordinary 44 goals in all competitions for the Reds that season – a tally surpassed just once in the club's history, by Ian Rush in 1983–84.

Salah's 32 league goals were also a record for a 38-game Premier League campaign – individually, the Egyptian scored more goals than West Brom, Swansea and Huddersfield managed from their entire squads.

"OH, S**T… IT'S TOO EARLY!"

After helping Liverpool past Manchester City into the Champions League semi-finals, Salah struck twice more against his old club Roma in the last four, then travelled to Kyiv to face-off against Real Madrid in the final, hopeful it could be the happiest day of his career.

"It was my dream to win the Champions League when I was young – more than the Premier League," he admits. "The Premier League was always the Liverpool dream, the dream of the city. But when I was young, I always watched the Champions League."

Just when everything was going so well, it all came crashing down when he was forced off the field with a shoulder injury just 31 minutes into the showpiece after tangling with Madrid captain Sergio Ramos. Salah couldn't hold back the tears.

"That was the worst feeling of my life in football," he explains now. "You'd had an unbelievable season, I scored more than 40 goals, you're in the final of the Champions League and you feel like you're very, very close. The World Cup is also after that, in one month. In that moment, everything comes to your head – you're out of the Champions League, you're injured; for the World Cup you're injured too. It was not the best feeling. But with time, I managed to handle it."

Salah made it to the World Cup but wasn't at peak fitness and missed Egypt's opening defeat to Uruguay. He scored against both

Clockwise from below One of the Egyptian's two top Reds goals; agony in the Champions League final; Firmino shows off his powers of telekinesis



"YOU'RE OUT OF THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE AND THE WORLD CUP. IT WAS THE WORST FEELING EVER"

Russia and Saudi Arabia, but the Pharaohs lost all three games on their first appearance at the tournament finals since 1990.

He carried the disappointment of Kyiv with him, using that pain as a driving force for the following campaign. "Yes, it was in my mind," he says. "It was like, 'OK, I lost this year, but I'm going to go next year and do my best to help the team win it'."

After signing a new long-term deal with the club, Salah brilliantly scored the goal that gave Liverpool a 1-0 win over Napoli in their final Champions League group game of 2018–19, narrowly squeezing them through to the knockout stages.

Concussion sustained in a league match at Newcastle meant he had to watch their famous semi-final second leg comeback against Barcelona from the sidelines. With Klopp's side 3-0 down from the first leg at the Camp Nou, the Egyptian wore a T-shirt bearing the phrase 'never give up', hoping to impact his team-mates in another way that night instead. Back for the final against Spurs in Madrid, he was offered the chance to make a rather more direct impact within two minutes of kick-off – stepping up to face Hugo Lloris from the penalty spot after Moussa Sissoko's handball.

"I always prepare myself before the game, but in that moment we got a penalty and I thought, 'Oh, s**t... it's too early, it's too early to have a penalty!'" he laughs now. "But I didn't want to think negatively. I was just thinking, 'You're going to score, it's going to be fine', so I just scored and the match became easier after that. They were a tough team to play against, but we won."

Salah will never forget that moment of victory, raising both arms aloft in sheer joy as the final whistle blew. "Finally, we won the Champions League – I think it was the first time for each one of us in the team," he says. "It was an unbelievable moment. I'd always wanted to win it one day, so it was something special, especially because the year before you lost it.

"My career has always been like that. I don't want to say up and down, but there's always something to challenge me – to lose the final, and I also came to the Premier League [with Chelsea] and didn't play that much. I left, then came back again. My life in football has always been like that."





HALF AN INCH FROM HISTORY

Even that season, the one in which he'd achieved his boyhood dream, there was an agonising moment that fuelled Salah for another year to come.

It came on his return to the Etihad and the setting for one of his favourite Liverpool goals, this time at the opposite end of the field. Liverpool topped the Premier League in early January 2019, seven points clear of City, when they travelled to face the reigning champions. Eighteen minutes into the game, with the score 0-0, Salah neatly exchanged passes with Roberto Firmino before playing Sadio Mané in on goal. After the Senegalese forward's shot struck the base of an upright, some slapstick defending led to John Stones booting his clearance straight into Ederson, sending the ball spinning towards goal. Just as Salah raced towards it to tap in if required, Stones hooked the ball off the line, somehow directing it through the Egyptian's legs to safety. It looked to everyone like the ball had already crossed the line when Stones made his clearance, but the goal decision system showed it hadn't – by 1.12 centimetres.

"It was so close," says Salah, still rewinding that moment in his mind for probably the millionth time. "I remember it well. I passed to Sadio, he shot, then Stones cleared the ball – but I was sure it was in, because I was running, I was really close and didn't put my foot in 100 per cent. I still put it in, but in my mind it was a goal.

"Then afterwards, I saw it was really, really tight," he says, holding his thumb and index finger close together to illustrate the



"SALAH'S AMBITIONS ARE HIGH – BUT HIS ATTITUDE IS HIGHER"

Salah has been Liverpool's top scorer for five successive seasons, but Reds assistant Pep Lijnders says there's so much more to the Egyptian than goals

"Mo Salah is so much more than a 'striker' for us. Our game stimulates this development and forces it to be that way, as everyone is responsible for everything.

At the same time, he's become more and more of a playmaker as well. He's a gifted finisher – his imagination and intuition in those moments is brilliant. The way that he can keep the ball in the toughest situations and find a way to come out and score is what identifies him. Many players have that, but few have it consistently; if you do, you're part of the world's best, because it's all about the mentality to never give less.

In the most influential matches, he's everywhere to be found. For me though, bigger than the achievement of his goals, it's his everyday presence inside our club. His character is very special, he's a true example to everyone, and that's what makes Mo such a great player. There's no bigger compliment in life. The best ones stay humble and are true examples.

He invests a huge amount of time in his preparations and treats his body well – we've seen him grow as a professional. His ambitions are high, but his attitude in training is higher. If there's one secret in life, that would be the one.

He's true to himself, and he has true peace of mind too. That really helps him, and he's always ready to assist others. I still believe what you are as a person is far more important than what you are as a player."

agony. "But it was what it was. We had to take it."

Liverpool lost that game 2-1 – their only league defeat of the season – and missed out on the title to City by a point. Had Salah beaten Stones to that ball, or had Stones' clearance ricocheted off him into the net, they'd have surely got the draw that would have secured them the club's first league championship since 1990, as the new Invincibles. Instead, they'd lost out on their dream by the barest of margins, despite winning their last nine matches of the season and amassing 97 points – then the third-highest points total in Premier League history. How's your luck?

Salah responded in the way he always has – the next season he went again, and he didn't stop until he'd banished any memory of that close call by helping Liverpool dominate the title race from the start.

This time when they faced a Manchester giant in January, they were 13 points clear, having won 20 and lost none of their opening 21 league matches – their only draw coming in a game Salah missed through injury. When Manchester United visited Anfield, Liverpool led 1-0 in front of a raucous crowd, before Salah raced clear in the final minute to seal victory, celebrating by ripping his shirt off to display his bare chest in front of the Kop. It was his first goal against United.

"That United game when I scored the second goal, that was my favourite moment that season," he says. "That year we had the confidence that, OK, the year before we'd done everything that was possible to win it. We lost only one game, so everybody was confident that we could go again and we could do it, because we'd got 97 points. We'd done a really good job to finish that season and try to win it, but we couldn't, so the year after we were more confident we could do it. And we did."

This time, Liverpool got 99 points. Having also lifted the Super Cup and their first ever Club World Cup, long-awaited Premier League glory was confirmed when Manchester City lost at Chelsea with a month of the season still remaining. The squad famously gathered in front of a giant screen at Formby Hall to watch the historic moment together.

"I think I was the only one who didn't want City to lose!" Salah laughs now. "I wanted us to win it in a game ourselves, because there were still a few left. I wanted us to win the game and then celebrate. But it was a great moment anyway – everybody was so happy."

"I WAS NEVER LAZY AT CHELSEA"

If 2020–21 didn't go to plan for Liverpool – a major injury crisis ended their hopes of retaining the title early on – Salah himself scored 31 times in all competitions, his best tally since that stellar 44-goal debut season.

This season he stepped it up again, netting 15 goals in his first 12 appearances, including that stunning solo effort against Manchester City, plus a hat-trick in Liverpool's 5-0 triumph at Manchester United. That afternoon, Salah became the first Reds player ever to score in ten successive games, and the first opposition player to bag a Premier League treble at Old Trafford. The last person to achieve that feat in any competition was his boyhood idol Ronaldo, for Real Madrid in the Champions League in 2003. The Brazilian himself has joined the long list of Salah admirers in recent times, declaring: "I love him, he's an incredible player." Those words meant an awful lot to Salah.

"Of course… I'm a big fan of *his*!" he beams, emphasising that last word, and still wide-eyed that the 2002 World Cup winner enjoys his own brand of stardust.

"He was one of the players who really made me love football – he was magic, one of the best ever. I met him once, we didn't talk much, but he's unbelievable.





Top Adding Liverpool's third goal in a 3-0 win at Anfield in 2019 **Above** Keeping his eye on the ball during Liverpool's 3-1 away win at Benfica in the first leg of the 2021–22 Champions League quarter-finals

"For me to score a hat-trick at Old Trafford was unbelievable, too. To be the first player in the Premier League to score a hat-trick there was something special because Liverpool and Manchester United are always like *this*…" he adds, banging his fists together to indicate fierce rivalry.

Salah's use of that word 'unbelievable' says much about the dream he's been living for five years now – a dream so good that it's been hard to take it all in sometimes, even if he insisted at the start of this interview that he foresaw many of the great things that have happened since he joined the club.

His time as a Liverpool player couldn't have been more of a contrast with that unhappy spell at Chelsea earlier in his career, when a move to the Premier League from Swiss side Basel didn't work out. Salah was signed during José Mourinho's time in









charge but barely used by the Portuguese boss – he started just six league games for the Blues, one of them ironically being the 2-0 victory at Anfield when Steven Gerrard's slip went a long way to denying Liverpool the title under Brendan Rodgers in 2014.

Did Salah almost need the setback of his time at Chelsea to make him the player he is today? "I think so," he says, after briefly pondering the question. "I mean, when I look back, I was young and I learned a lot. That was one of the most important periods of my life – I saw what I needed to do to improve myself, what I needed to do to compete with everyone at that level. I didn't play that much and I was disappointed, very disappointed – I'm a player who wants to play and be on the pitch all the time.

"I didn't regret anything, any decision, and you can ask anyone there – I was always there before training in the gym, after training doing shooting and stuff like that. I was never being lazy or something, but it took a lot of thinking at that time, about what I could do to improve, what I could do to be at that level. That's why I decided I needed to leave England at that moment, so I left for two and a half years. Then I came back..."

Salah returned to the Premier League a different player, and a different man. Every time he takes to the field, he has no doubts about his talent. "I'm confident," he insists. "I love playing football – this is the thing I do and I enjoy it. There's always pressure, but that's normal because you play at the top level and you want to win things, both for the team and individually. There is pressure, but with time you can handle that more."

"IN MY MIND, I ALWAYS PICK MYSELF AS THE BEST PLAYER IN THE WORLD – NO ONE ELSE"

Clockwise from above Celebrating opening the scoring in the 2019 Champions League final; Slamming home his 100th Premier League goal, against Leeds in 2021; Getting to grips with Ol' Big Ears

Salah is relentless in his expectations of himself. You don't deliver as consistently as he has over the last five years without having that kind of mentality.

"During my career, I've learned a lot of things – about how to be more in the game, mentally and physically," he says. "For me, every single game is very important – nothing changes from big game to small game. All of them are big for me, because in all of them you have to win the three points, or if you're playing in the Champions League, you have to qualify. I prepare myself very well for every game. That helps me a lot."

THE QUEST FOR THE BALLON D'OR

By early April this season, that mentality had brought him 28 goals, already topping his tally from the campaigns that delivered Champions League and Premier League glory. His 20 league goals had put him head and shoulders above everyone else, making him the hot favourite to win the PFA Player of the Year prize for a second time. This season more than ever, many have started to view him as the best player in the world.

Asked what the secret has been to his goalscoring form this term, though, and he's adamant it's nothing specific. "There's no secret!" he chuckles. "I think I've been the team's top scorer for the last five years, and I'm always trying to help us win – not only with my goals, but also my number of assists are really high, compared with anyone else in my position in the Premier League," he makes a point of adding. On the day we talk, only Trent Alexander-Arnold can boast more than the Egyptian's ten Premier League assists this season.

But Salah doesn't shy away from his ambition to do something no player from an Arab country has ever done: win the Ballon d'Or. "Yeah," he says. "Of course it means a lot to win it. One of my purposes in life is to change the people, especially in my country, an Arab country – so that they can achieve what they want to achieve. Those things give them more belief in themselves, that they can do whatever they want."

So far, Salah is yet to top his fifth-placed finish in the Ballon d'Or rankings following Champions League glory in 2019 – many were surprised that he finished just seventh in the voting in 2021. This year, he's been vying with Karim Benzema and Robert Lewandowski for top spot – Lionel Messi's underwhelming goals tally for Paris Saint-Germain makes him unlikely to retain the award, and *France Football*'s decision to hold this year's gala before the World Cup, only including events up to and including July, means there's likely to be a greater emphasis on club football.

Asked whether he currently views himself as the best player in the world, Salah doesn't need long to think.



Mo is wearing the Salah Squadra training range, created by Adidas

"In my mind, yes, I'm always saying that," he admits. "I will never say, 'Yeah, I'm better than this person or I'm better than that guy,' no, but in my own mind I'm always choosing myself as the best – I don't choose anybody other than me. It's always opinion, though. I respect all other players."

He's full of respect, too, for the legends who have gone before him at Liverpool, even if he's been putting their records under threat. In September, Salah became the fastest ever to reach 100 top-flight goals for the club, achieving the feat in only 151 appearances, beating a mark previously set by the late Roger Hunt. "The records mean something special to me," admits Salah. "Since I came here, I've always been trying to win games for the team, win trophies, and of course, score goals. Every record you break, I feel good. I put a lot of work into it for that. It's something I'm proud of."

This season the Egyptian has also moved into Liverpool's top ten scorers of all time. "That feels great, and hopefully before I go, I will be the first one," he says with a smile. It's quite a target, given he's on 153 as we talk today, and Ian Rush's record stands at an incredible 346. That's a lot of goals...

"Yeah, it is!" he laughs. "I don't know how many games they used to play at that time, but how many goals he used to score... more than 300, it's quite tough to get. But let's see."

Salah turns 30 in June, but the days of that milestone being the start of a footballer's decline are long gone. The previous four Ballon d'Or winners have been Cristiano Ronaldo at 32, Luka Modrić at 33, then Messi at 32 and 34. Lewandowski is still going as strong as ever at 33; a 40-year-old Zlatan Ibrahimović has still been netting in Serie A.

"I didn't think about the fact I'm going to turn 30," smiles Salah. "I ask some players and they say it's a different feeling when you turn 30, but I don't know, I'm feeling fine. I'm enjoying life, I'm enjoying football – it doesn't matter how old you are now.

"Now you can see that with players – all of them extend their careers. You can see the top players always after 32, 33, you can see a lot of them – Lewandowski, Benzema, Messi, Ronaldo, Zlatan, a lot of players; also [Edin] Džeko in Italy, [Olivier] Giroud.

"All of them perform really well after 30, so I'm not concerned about that."

PARROT FAN CLUB

Salah has been in negotiations with Liverpool for some time now over an extension to his

"THE FANS KNOW WHAT I WANT – THE CONTRACT ISN'T ALL ABOUT MONEY"

existing contract, scheduled to expire at the end of next season. PSG, Real Madrid and Barcelona have all been linked, in case an agreement to stay at Anfield isn't reached. As we talk in early April, there's still no news on a resolution.

His ambition to chase down Ian Rush's Liverpool goalscoring record makes it clear to everyone where his heart lies, that he wants to stay at the club for as long as possible. As good as he is, even Salah is unlikely to score nearly 200 goals in the next 13 months.

But asked whether he's confident he will indeed stay at Liverpool for a few years yet, he's unable to give us a definitive answer.

"I don't know, I have one year left," he says. "I think the fans know what I want, but in the contract it's not everything about the money at all. So I don't know, I can't tell you exactly. I have one year left and the fans know what I want."

As he's said publicly before, he reiterates that, in an ideal world, his ambition has always been to stay. "Yeah," he says. "This club means a lot to me – I've enjoyed my football here more than anywhere, I gave the club everything and everybody saw that. I'm always trying to help the team, I've had a lot of unbelievable moments here winning trophies, individual goals, individual trophies. I feel it's like a family here."

He insists he's never been worried either, about the possibility of going into the last year of his deal with his future unresolved. "I'm not worried, I don't let myself worry about something," he says. "The season hasn't finished yet, so let's finish the season in the best possible way – that's the most important thing. Then in the final year we're going to see what's going to happen. But I don't know, I don't think about that a lot. I'm just trying to enjoy the football, trying to enjoy the season and that's it."

In the myriad newspaper articles that have been written during these contract negotiations, speculation even circulated that other clubs might try to make a move for him this summer. Given that he's always had a contract for the 2022–23 campaign, new deal or not, he's always been fully expecting to be with Liverpool next term.

"Yeah. Er, I think so?" he says, sounding surprised that it had even been speculated about. "But if they want me to go, that's something different!" he says, with a laugh that suggests he's not entirely serious. Just





Below Salah is determined to break Rush's all-time goal record

"WATCHING SALAH EVERY WEEK IS A PRIVILEGE"

Matt Ladson from *This Is Anfield* explains what the Egyptian King means to Liverpool lovers who watch him every week...

Liverpool fans have been privileged to watch some of the finest footballers in the world grace the Anfield turf but, arguably for the first time in history, the best player on the planet now plays for the Reds.

For exactly that reason, watching Mo Salah has been an honour for Kopites – we know that this player and these times are a luxury to be enjoyed. Just like we appreciated some of the greats of the game playing for the opposition, now we know how much it means to have this opportunity in front of our eyes each week.

When Salah is truly on his game, twisting and turning the opposition left-back, you can feel the appreciation and anticipation from the Anfield stands. When he collects the ball in that pocket just on the edge of the box and starts another jinking dribble into the area, the mind instantly gives flashbacks to similar goals, of which there are now plenty, most notably against Manchester City, Spurs, Everton and Arsenal.

When he collects the ball deeper and starts running at back-tracking defenders, darting into space down the wing, you recall such Champions League nights as Roma and City away, and his celebration, both arms outstretched, after his dinked goal at the Etihad in 2018, now immortalised as part of a mural of Salah on Anfield Road (above).

Salah might not be remembered as the Reds' greatest ever player – that debate will probably always be between King Kenny and Steven Gerrard – but in terms of consistency and contribution to the club, he should be at the very top of the conversation.

Perhaps only once he leaves can his legacy be truly evaluated and put into perspective. We're witnessing a true great.



like Salah has always wanted to remain at Liverpool, the club have long since made it clear they want to keep him – after everything he's achieved, that's no surprise to anyone.

The bond between Salah and Liverpool has become so strong that whenever the Egyptian does depart Anfield – potentially a moment that's still many years away – he already knows he'll feel deeply sad to leave.

"Yeah, of course," he says. "To play in that atmosphere and see the fans always behind me – I have banners in the stadium, two or three, and they're always singing my song, so it's going to be a really sad moment."

It's not only Reds fans who sing Salah's song – head over to YouTube and you'll find Liverpool-supporting parrots singing it, too. "Mo Salah, Mo Salah, Mo Salah, running down the wing, Salaaaaaaaaaaaaah, the Egyptian king," the exotic bird chirps, to the tune of 'Sit Down' by indie band James, who clearly have quite the psittacine following.

Salah has already delivered five trophies to the parrots and the people of Liverpool – after the Premier League, Champions League, Super Cup and Club World Cup, he tasted victory in his first Wembley final in February when helping Klopp's side defeat Chelsea to lift the League Cup.

"Lifting that first trophy in the middle of the season was great – it showed us there's a few more things to win," he says, talking ahead of Liverpool's mouthwatering FA Cup semi-final with Manchester City and the closing stages of both the Premier League and Champions League.

"Hopefully we can get the three. If not, then at least the Premier League and the Champions League."

"YOU'VE GOT TO BE GREEDY, IN A GOOD WAY. YOU WANT TO WIN A TROPHY, LIKE THIS IS YOUR RIGHT"

At least? "At least!" he laughs, jokingly doubling down on his assessment that winning only the League Cup, league title and a second European crown wouldn't be his idea of the perfect season, but it would probably have to do. It gives you an insight into the mentality of the man and the reason he's progressed to become arguably the best player on the planet.

Winning the Premier League and Champions League once was already pretty impressive. Winning them again, whenever that might be, would cement his greatness. Salah is determined to make it happen, this year if possible.

"Yeah, winning them both again would make me win the Ballon d'Or, so..." he says, before that beaming smile breaks out, and he interrupts himself mid-sentence with a laugh.

No matter how much success Salah has already had, it will never be enough. "It's a hunger," he explains. "I want to win them two, three, four times. Why not?

"It's a dream for everybody, you can dream whatever you want to, and you can achieve whatever you want to achieve. It's my dream to win the Premier League three or four times because a football player's career is short, between 15 and 20 years maybe, some players less.

"You just need to achieve everything, you have to be greedy – I mean greedy in a good way, like you want to win that trophy, like this is your right. It depends what you want to achieve, what you decide. I always decide in my mind that I want to win the Premier League and the Champions League again and again, as it's an unbelievable feeling. Winning both is unbelievable."

There's that word again. Yet Salah believed from day one at Liverpool that he could win those trophies – he promised his friends as much, then he made it a spectacular reality.

Since he walked back into English football five years ago with a point to prove and a pair of slippers on his feet, Salah has had no shortage of Cinderella moments. If he gets his wish, this fairytale has plenty more chapters ahead.



Top 'Don't drop it, Hendo!' **Above** 'That's right, Mateo, you have a lie down while I crack on'


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LIVERPOOL RELOADED

Jürgen Klopp may be leaving, but he's set the Reds up to continue challenging for the game's biggest prizes

Words Mark White



On a cold Friday morning in January, Jürgen Klopp sat down in front of a camera. This wasn't for a pre-match press conference, which over the years have become banterous affairs soundtracked by the booming laugh of the grinning German. This time there was just the one interviewer. This was more of a monologue than a back-and-forth tussle between Klopp and the media.

"I love absolutely everything about this club, I love everything about the city, I love everything about our supporters, I love the team, I love the staff. I love everything," he told the world. "It is that I am... running out of energy.

"After the years we had together and after all the time we spent together and after all the things we went through together, the respect grew for you, the love grew for you, and the least I owe you is the truth – and that is the truth."

They were the words that no Liverpool fan was expecting – certainly not now. Klopp's decision to leave in 2024 brings what feels like a premature end to a time on Merseyside that spans nine years. In almost a decade, he ended a long league drought, won the club's sixth Champions League title and lifted everything else in between. But not all managers should be judged by their silverware, and Jürgen Norbert Klopp certainly falls into that category.

One could argue that Arsenal have been curiously intertwined with Liverpool during Klopp's time on Merseyside. It was by beating the Gunners 4-3 on Matchday 1 of 2016–17 that the Reds showed their attacking intensity in full flow on Sadio Mané's debut. Then, in 2023, a 2-2 draw at home to Mikel Arteta's side heralded a rebirth of sorts.

Above Klopp has twice won the Premier League Manager of the Season Award and overseen 205 league victories **Below** Van Dijk has made 188 Premier League appearances for Liverpool to date



The 2022–23 season had been a tough one, with Liverpool falling to nine defeats prior to Arsenal's visit. But the crowd at Anfield on that April day witnessed the start of a new era as Trent Alexander-Arnold was given more licence to drift than ever before. The full-back inverted into midfield, creating, probing and picking up pockets of space like only he could: he was unpressable, unplayable, setting Firmino up to nod home Liverpool's second goal with a sublime cross as Klopp watched his side come back from 2-0 down to snatch a point. They were unlucky not to get all three.

A run would follow. Liverpool won the following seven, looking more like their old selves, not just with Alexander-Arnold running the show but Mo Salah, Diogo Jota and Cody Gakpo firing on all cylinders. 15 goals in the next four games made a statement, and so did the following two 1-0 wins against Brentford and Fulham, in which Klopp's team showed a level of control they never possessed when he was building his first Liverpool side.

Suddenly, a team that had looked so tired got a second wind. Liverpool packed out the midfield, with Alexander-Arnold providing an extra body in the centre of the pitch, while opposite full-back Andrew Robertson still bombed forward to help in attack. Had the renaissance started a week or two earlier they would probably have made the top four. As it was, Liverpool had to settle for the Europa League.

That summer, though, Anfield welcomed much-needed new blood. Four new midfielders arrived, with Dominik Szoboszlai, Alexis Mac Allister, Wataru Endō and Ryan Gravenberch adding depth to the centre of the park. Long-serving captain Jordan Henderson controversially left for Saudi Arabia, while Naby Keïta, James Milner, Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, Fabinho and Roberto Firmino also departed. The stage was set for a newer, younger Liverpool. No one knew what to expect.

"THE STAGE WAS SET FOR A NEWER, YOUNGER LIVERPOOL"

Liverpool drew against Chelsea on the opening weekend and then beat Bournemouth 3-1 at home, but it was at St James' Park on Matchday 3 that Liverpool



fans saw what their new side was truly made of – and it reminded them of the best Klopp sides of old.

Liverpool went a goal and then a man down at Newcastle, Virgil van Dijk dismissed on 28 minutes for a rash foul on Alexander Isak shortly after Anthony Gordon had put the hosts ahead. They were still trailing on 77 minutes when Darwin Núñez entered the fray in what would prove to be a truly inspired substitution.

Just four minutes after coming on, the Uruguayan lashed a low shot beyond Nick Pope to level the match. And he wasn't done yet. Racing on to a perfectly weighted Salah through ball, Núñez kept his composure to steer home a 93rd-minute winner.

Impressive wins over Wolves, West Ham and Aston Villa followed before a controversial loss away to Tottenham. Alexander-Arnold continued pulling the strings, with virtuoso performances against Manchester City and Fulham. There was talk of him being the best player in the world, while Salah was reborn as a more creative threat, able to supply as well as



Left Unlike Sir Alex Ferguson and Arsène Wenger, Klopp departs Liverpool having built a squad for the future **Below** Darwin Núñez is developing into a potent striker

demand the ball himself. Harvey Elliott and Curtis Jones stepped up to more senior roles with an assurance belying their years.

This Liverpool side began to really purr on Boxing Day 2023. A 2-0 win against Burnley was followed by four goals against Newcastle, Bournemouth and Chelsea. When Klopp first arrived, his aim was to organise his side off the ball, win the ball as high up the pitch as possible and encourage positional fluidity. Eight whole years later, this was a team still intent on doing the hard yards without possession, still embodying those principles. None of the players who started that very first game – a 0-0 draw with Tottenham – were still around. Yet watching Klopp's men scythe through their opponents, there was a clear thread between then and now.

This was a team that few had tipped for a title at the start of the campaign matching

"TO JUDGE KLOPP PURELY BY THE NUMBERS IS TO DO HIM A DISSERVICE"

Manchester City and Arsenal blow for blow in the heat of a title race. They blitzed their Europa League group, waltzed to another League Cup final and disposed of Arsenal in the third round of the FA Cup. This was a Liverpool side that had the wealth of experience of the likes of Van Dijk, Salah, even Alexander-Arnold while blooding the next generation coming through. They still pressed with the trademark Klopp intensity while showing the brilliance and the composure in games that they lacked at times when Klopp first arrived.

And then the bombshell dropped: Jürgen Klopp would be stepping away from the team that he'd built from scratch, doing something that very few football managers actually do: walking away at the very top.

The German claimed that he had lost his energy, but there was little sign of that in the way that his side had been playing ever since that frenetic draw at home to Arsenal. The truly impressive thing is that where previous Klopp sides have revelled in chaos, this one focused on control. This was a team that still racked up the goals and played the thrilling high line, but one that would slowly squeeze the life out of teams like a boa constrictor rather than tossing its prey about mercilessly.

Above Liverpool broke the bank in July 2022 to keep Salah, making him the club's highest-paid player **Below** Alexis Mac Allister has proved to be an astute signing



Even so, it's possible that the biggest changes are yet to come. Mohamed Salah is well into his thirties now, and if attempts from Saudi Arabia to sign the Egyptian last summer are anything to go by, he's still a wanted man. Then there's Trent Alexander-Arnold, who may yet be properly converted into a midfielder at some point, with his idiosyncratic full-back position a head-scratcher for any new manager.

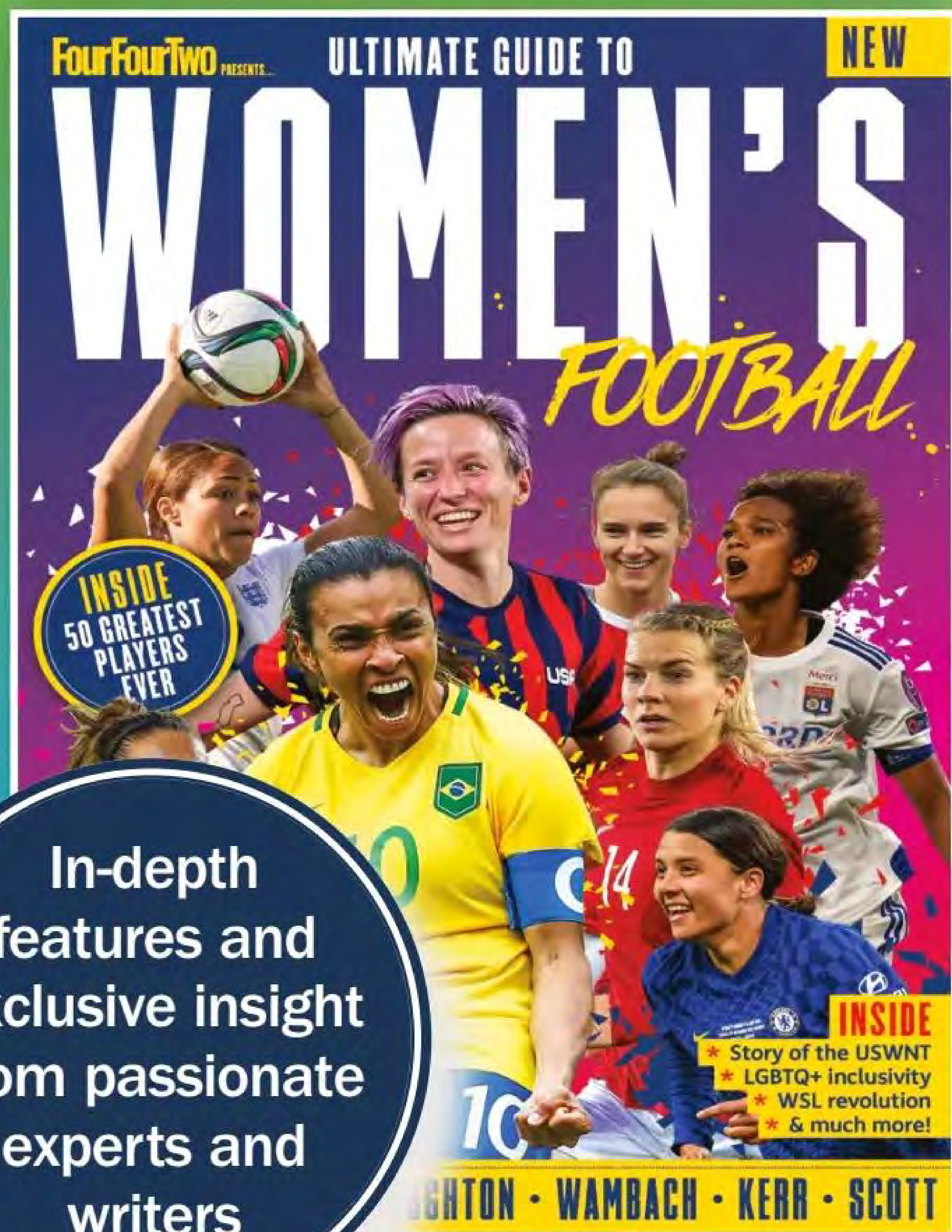
When Klopp's shock departure was first confirmed it was also announced that his assistant Pep Lijnders, who many had thought might replace the German, would also be leaving, meaning the Liverpool hierarchy, which will include new sporting director Richard Hughes, has a massive decision to make this summer.

Xabi Alonso was the first name on the lips of just about every Red going in the days after Klopp's decision went public. However, he won't be stepping into the Anfield dugout any time soon after committing his future to Bayer Leverkusen, where Alonso is on the verge of breaking Bayern Munich's stranglehold on the Bundesliga. Sporting Lisbon's Rúben Amorim has since become the favourite to succeed Klopp.

Regardless of who ultimately gets the job, they will have colossal boots to fill. A managerial departure has seldom sent such shock waves throughout the footballing world. Jürgen Klopp will leave Liverpool having won every trophy under the sun, but to judge him purely by the numbers is to do him a disservice.

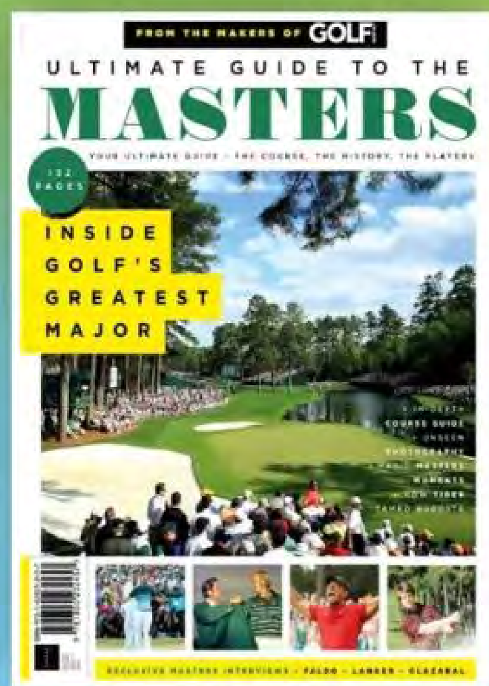
This is a man who has brought pure joy to Anfield on countless occasions. He built a world-class side that swept Europe's best aside, then sold many of those players and constructed another side capable of taking the fight to rivals, thereby leaving the next man in charge with an easier job thanks to his contingency plans.

Reds fans have known that Klopp is one of the great coaches of his time. Under the next man, they'll see just how good he was at squad building, too. A League Cup triumph with academy products peppered in the side proved it. The future is bright. Klopp will leave Anfield having set Liverpool up to continue to honour his legacy with fluid football and, no doubt, many more trophies.

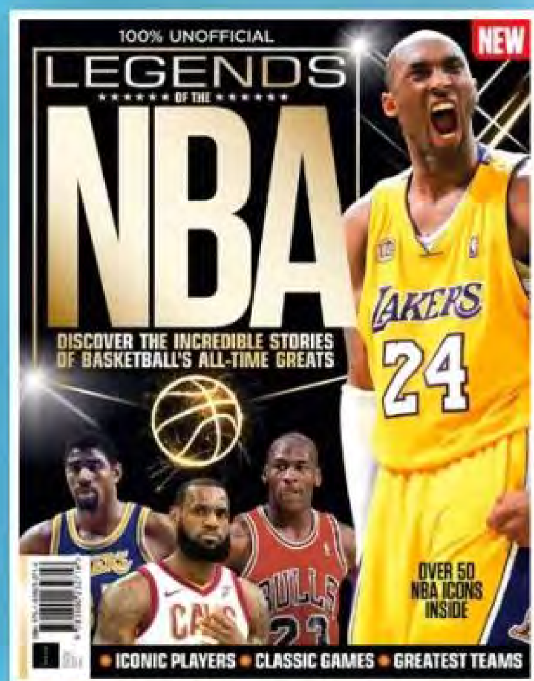


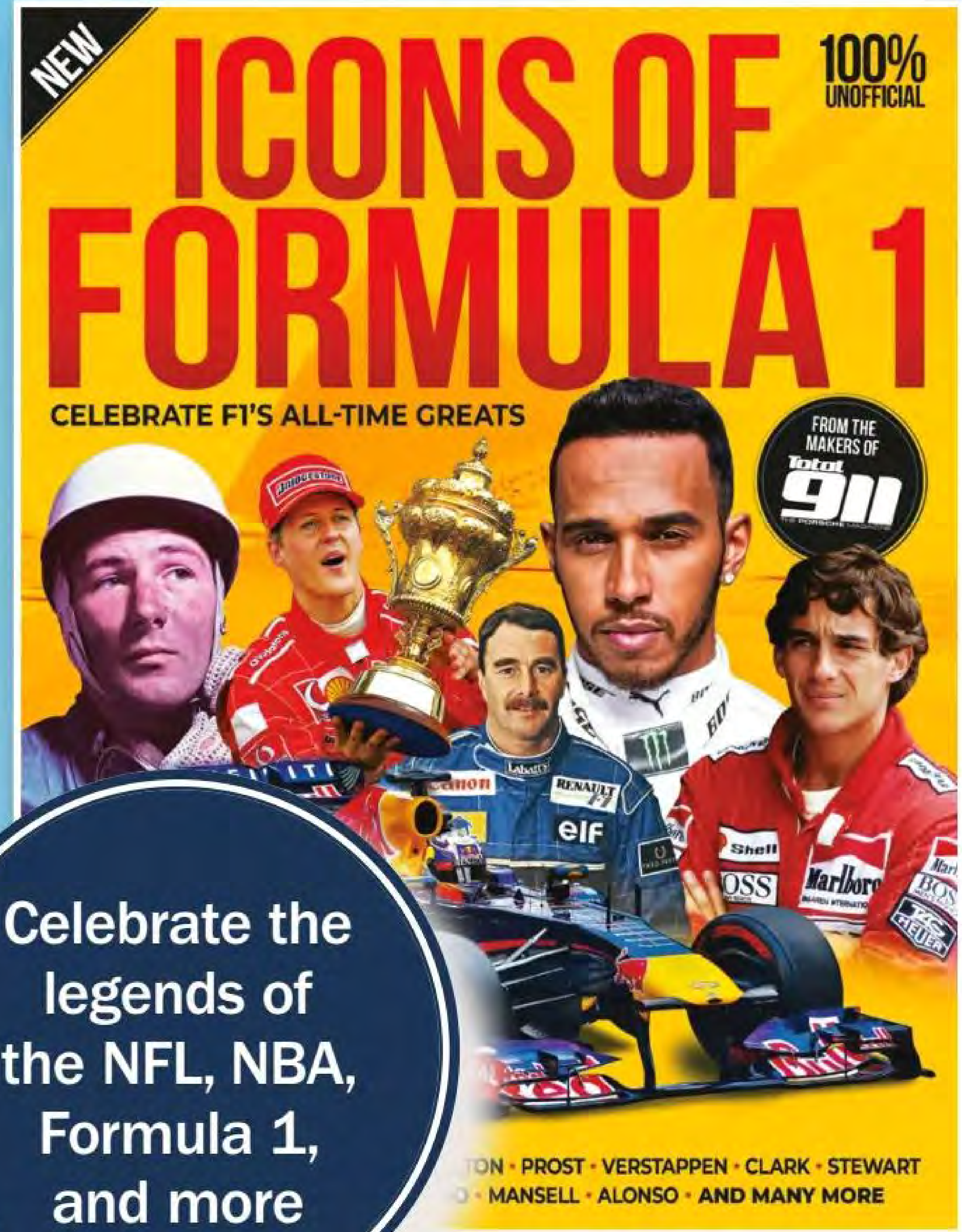
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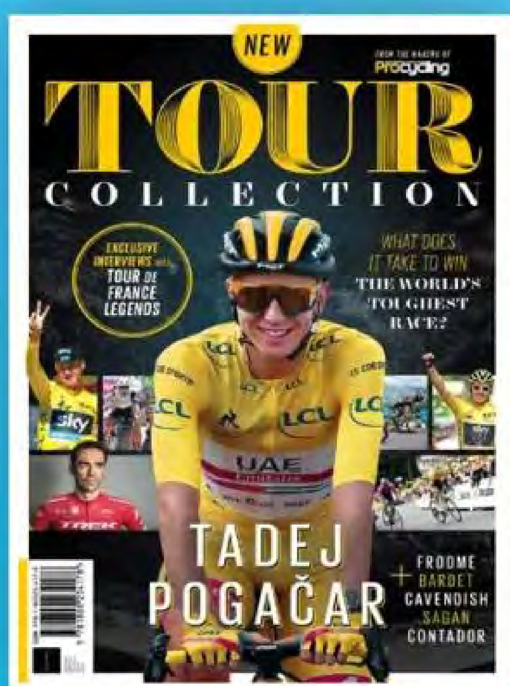




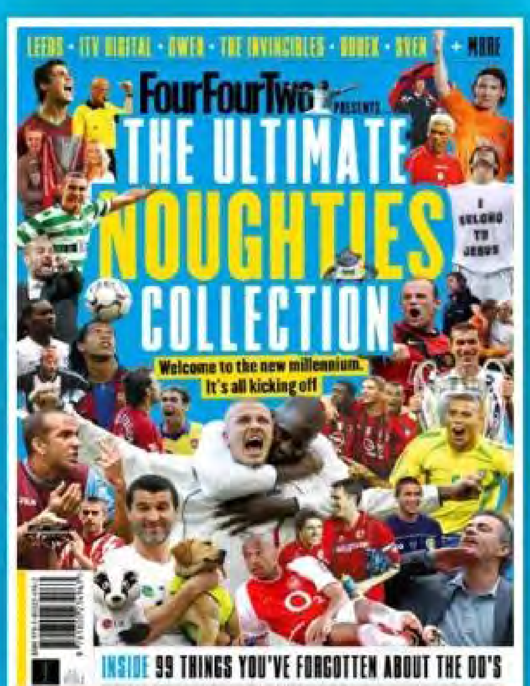


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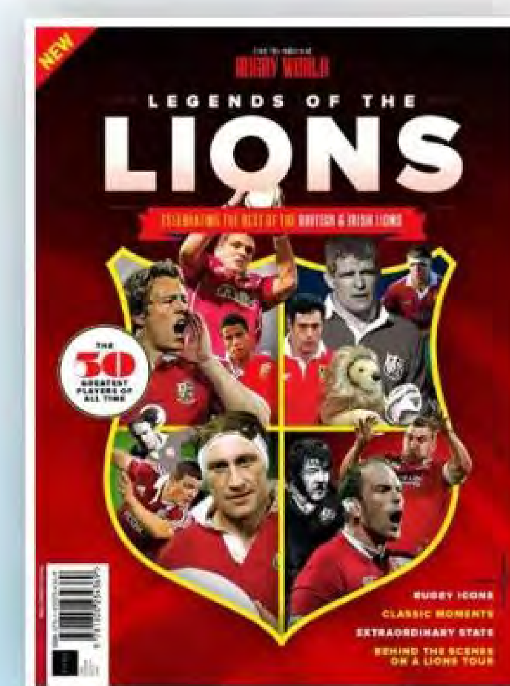






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VALUE OF LIVERPOOL FC



857
IAN CALLAGHAN'S RECORD APPEARANCE TALLY



8
FA CUPS

61,276
CAPACITY OF ANFIELD



42
CHAMPIONS LEAGUE GOALS SCORED BY MOHAMED SALAH, MORE THAN ANY OTHER LIVERPOOL PLAYER



2,168
PREMIER LEAGUE GOALS SCORED



1,222
PREMIER LEAGUE GAMES PLAYED

9-0
BIGGEST PREMIER LEAGUE VICTORY
(VS BOURNEMOUTH, 27 AUGUST 2022)

649
PREMIER LEAGUE WINS







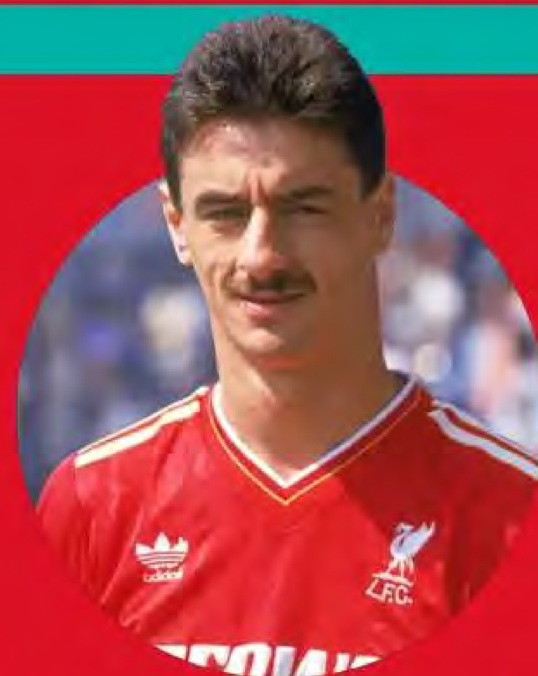








EUROPEAN CUPS



346
IAN RUSH'S RECORD GOAL TALLY



10
LEAGUE CUPS

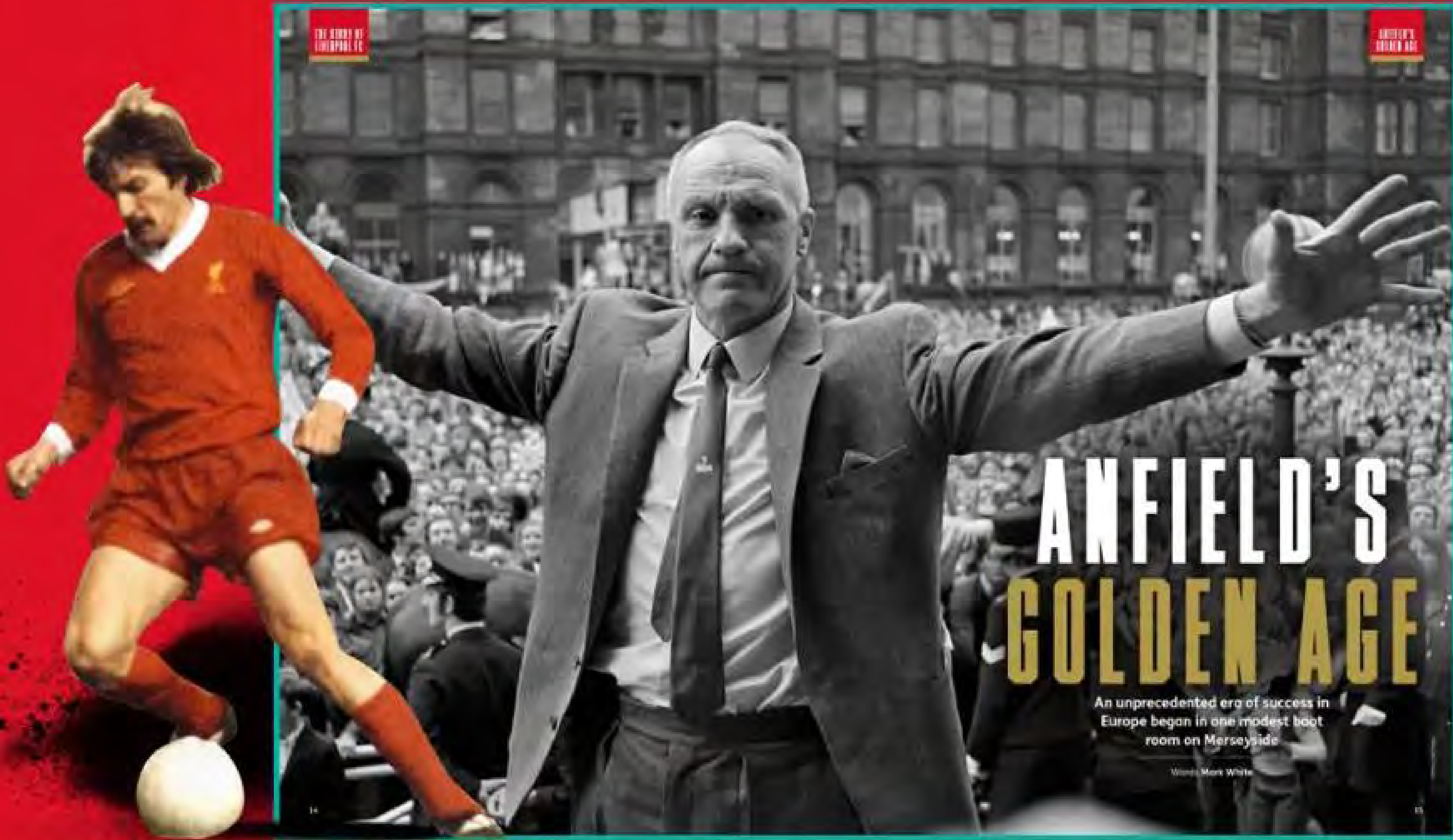
* STATISTICS ACCURATE AS OF 08/04/2024

100% UNOFFICIAL

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THE STORY OF LIVERPOOL FC



THE LIVER BIRD RISES

Discover how Shankly, Paisley and Fagan spearheaded an era of domestic and European dominance



THE KID WHO WOULD BE KING

Steven Gerrard arrived at Anfield as a boy. He would leave it a legend



GREATEST GAFFERS

Meet the Reds' most iconic managers, men who have led the club through good times and bad



A REVOLUTION ON THE MERSEY

Jürgen Klopp might be stepping away, but he's built a machine primed to keep on winning long after he is gone

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